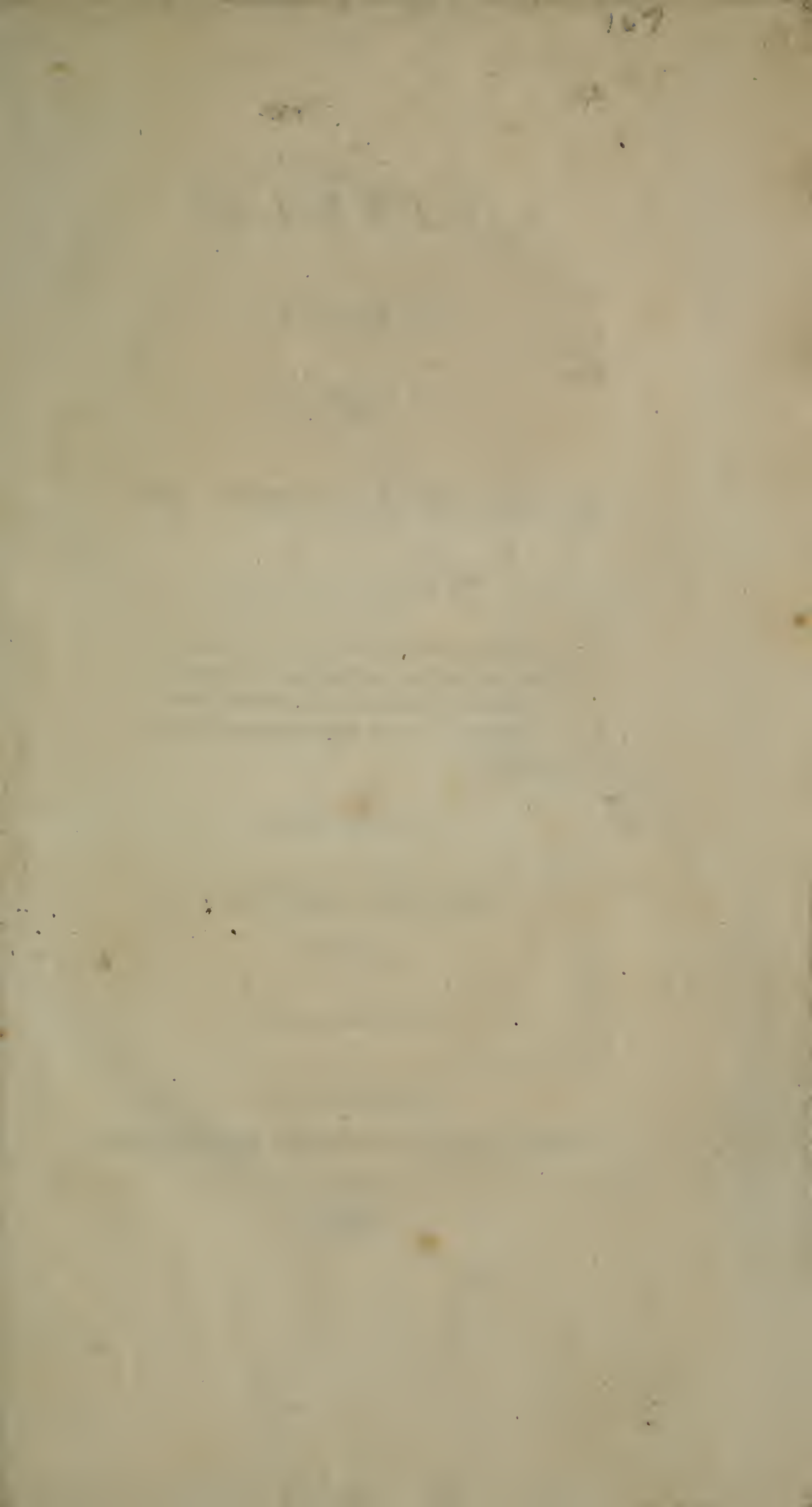


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ISABELLA.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "RHODA," &c.

"Take if you can, ye careless and supine,
Counsel and caution from a voice like mine.
Truths that the theorist could never reach,
And observation taught me, — I teach."

COWPER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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ries, which, if they could be illustrated, would be no longer mysteries. Nor do they pretend to argue the plea of Faith versus Works — nor Works versus Faith. No! we leave such high and inscrutable matters to those who prefer the means to the end. We deal in simple facts; and present you with the veritable, and, as we trust, the delightful

HISTORY

OF

ISABELLA HASTINGS.

Isabella was the eldest daughter of Lady Jane Hastings, a widow, whose purposed web of life had been broken to pieces by the unexpected accident of her husband dying before his father. By this untimely, and, as Lady Jane always called it, *unnatural* event, the title and fortunes which had determined her choice in a companion for

life, had eluded her hopes, and had rested with a younger brother of her husband's. The several sons which had blessed the first period of the marriage had all died in their infancy; and several years having elapsed between the death of the last, and the quick succession in which she had presented Mr. Hastings with the three daughters who survived him, Lady Jane found herself, on his death, in the wane of life, without having made one ascending step from the rank in which she was born, with a limited income, and three girls, who, if they were to be countesses, baronesses, or even splendidly - established commoners, could only hope to be so by the favours bestowed upon them by Nature, or from the reputation imposed upon them by education. In the minute features of the loveliest babe ever born, it is beyond the skill of the

most practised eye to ascertain whether the expanding form will be that of ugliness or beauty. Lady Jane was resolved to leave nothing to chance; she determined to inflict on the powerless victims every accomplishment that could adorn beauty, if such should be their happy lot, or which would most effectually countervail the want of it, were she destined to be the unfortunate creature who was to *bring out* to observation a train of Misses whom no one would wish to look upon.

From these motives Isabella had received what Lady Jane called, “the best of all possible educations.” Not, indeed, in one particular, resembling those of the present day; where authority seems to have changed hands, and the child rules the parent. “*Sic volo*” was Lady Jane’s motto: and, as her maternal feelings were not of a nature to lead her to sacrifice the fu-

ture well-being of her offspring to the indulgence of the present moment, she was not deterred by any harshness in the process from pursuing the end which she had in view. But who shall arraign the motives of parental fondness? She *could* only design the good of her children; and her indefatigable labourings to promote this good were so evident to all, that the least candid of her acquaintance could not but allow that the Misses Hastings were contracting a debt of obligation to their mother, that the most implicit obedience in their disposal in life, and their most devoted affection through the course of it, would but inadequately discharge.

Does any one ask upon what foundation so extensive a claim was rested? the answer is easy. No one could accumulate a greater variety of dancing and drawing, of singing and language

masters for their daughters than Lady Jane Hastings had done; no one could have poured into their tender minds a greater portion of premature knowledge, and no slave-master could more rigorously have enacted the fulfilment of every successive task than had Lady Jane.

Nor let it be supposed that the moral of education had escaped the acuteness of her intellect. She well knew, when properly modified, how it might tend to enhance the merit of the more essential parts of her system; the additional brilliancy which the setting might give to the stone. Her moral was not indeed conveyed in the antiquated phraseology of the apostolic age, but she had many, if not unanswerable, reasons to prove, that it meant the same thing. If she dropped the *motive* “for letting their light to shine before men,” she enforced the

duty. No one could instil into the tender minds of the pupils a higher respect for the "world's good opinion," nor a greater dread of its censure; nor could more eruditely instruct them in all the mysteries of a "dignified pride," nor better inforce the sacredness of the duties that we owe "to ourselves." If in the spirited acting up to the full sense of such instructions the confines of another's pride were trespassed upon, or the duties that we owe "to others" were forgotten, the fault was not Lady Jane's. Inconveniences must happen to individuals, but each ought to take care of themselves. So she had been instructed; by the rule which she now gave she had acted; and she imagined that she could plead her own success as a proof of the solidity of its foundation.

As the master architect, Lady Jane

attended herself to the great outlines of her daughters' education; the minor parts she left to be filled by the assistant governess. Her own time being fully occupied by seeing that the expensive attendance of the various accomplishment masters was not thrown away, or that the person during their absence lost not the ply which it had been the result of so much trouble to give it, she committed to Mrs. Obrien all the cares of religious instruction. Having made it an indispensable part of her recommendation that she should be "a member of the Established Church," she modestly said, that she considered her as a person better fitted than herself to go into all the "detail of such matters."—"Mrs. Obrien had been educated to understand them;" and indeed she had "no great fault to find with the manner of enforcing what she

knew ;”—“ if there were a little too much point made of outward observances which sometimes encroached upon a time barely sufficient for all the necessary parts of education, or a little too literal an interpretation of rules and précepts which a more extended intellect would have taken in a more liberal sense, yet the error was on the right side. Provided that nothing more important was omitted, there was no harm, while girls were young, in being something more scrupulous, perhaps than others, of doing, what however all the world did, and what all the world must do in the end,—but the reputation of strictness had its advantages, and she must acknowledge that nobody could have nobler sentiments than Mrs. Obrien, or could better know how to instil them into her pupils ; so that she hoped there would be no great harm done by a lit-

tle preciseness while they continued in the school-room,—it made them more obedient there, and would soon wear off when they came into the world.”

Lady Jane had already begun to reap the reward of so happy an union of energy and supineness,—of vigilant watchfulness and dormant confidence,—of unbending controul and modest acquiescence. It was agreed on all hands that Lady Jane was the most exemplary of mothers, and the Misses Hastings the best educated of daughters. Lady Jane drew the consequence, that the Misses Hastings would be the earliest and best established young ladies of the age, that is of the next—five years! Already she had a little foretaste of this supreme felicity in the disappointment which seemed to hover over the as strenuous, but, as she conceived, less well-directed efforts of her sister-in-law, the Lady

Stanton. — Lady Stanton had a little preceded her in the race of bringing up, and bringing out, “accomplished females,” and Lady Jane having felt that the titled daughters of Lady Stanton had advantages beyond any which she could claim for her own, she had wisely *appeared* to waive all competition where she had little hope of victory. She had calculated, indeed, that the most formidable of these daughters would be disposed of before she brought any of her own under public observation; but Lady Charlotte Stanton had now “been out” the last three years, and she was Lady Charlotte Stanton still! — Lady Jane wondered how it could be! — for she was beautiful as an angel, or a goddess, or any other unearthly being which happened to occur to Lady Jane’s imagination when she spoke of her niece — yet perhaps it might be accounted for — she had

always seen errors in her sister's way of bringing up her girls : errors which she flattered herself she had kept free from. The difference would be seen. —Isabella, after all, might be disposed of before her transcendant cousin. Every body knew how strictly her daughters had been educated.—Lady Stanton's system was different, — it might be right ; — it might attract more admirers, but for her part she did not think it so likely to secure husbands.— Men liked women who had been used to obey ; who would not always have a will of their own.—*If* she had taught her daughters *any* thing, it was the natural superiority of the other sex, and the necessity in all females to bow to it.—Men did not like to be shouldered by an equal every hour in the day ; if they wanted amusement they could find it elsewhere.— A cheerful, quiet home, was

what men sought for when they *did* marry. — Wives that had talents at their husband's command, not such as were always seeking for public display. She was sure Lord Stanton was of her opinion — he had often said, — “we are wrong Jane, you are right — you bring up your daughters so as that they may make rational men happy — Lady Stanton educates hers as if they were never to know control.”

“She had endeavoured to deserve such approbation. She had educated her daughters for wives, and she did *suspect* they would be sooner sought than those who might perhaps have some outward advantages over them.”

These suspicions were swelling fast into hopes when she saw the first, the second, and the third year of Lady Charlotte's “entrance into the world” come and go, without the great end of all Lady Stanton's cares having been

answered. These hopes broke out in a little civil triumphing ; a little complimentary comparison of her own ways of education when opposed to those of Lady Stanton, rounded off with the candid acknowledgment, that “every body know their own concerns best ;” and that “nobody could deny but that Lady Stanton as earnestly desired the establishment of her children as any body in the world could ; but the issue would be seen.”

This prophecy was now upon the point of being accomplished. Isabella descended from the school room, and entered the arena where her cousin had been skirmishing for the last three years with so little success ; and now the great problems of each of these relative, but rival families were, “whether Isabella would be established in her first season,”—or, “whether Lady Charlotte would be established at all.”

CHAP. II.

“I would not marry her, 'though she was endowed with all that Adam had left him before he transgressed.” SHAKESPEARE.

NOTHING could be more opposite than the characters of Isabella and Lady Charlotte. Isabella brought up under the strictest discipline, with the whole weight of parental authority unceasingly pressing on her imagination, — accustomed to have her performances severely criticised, and being scantily fed with praise, even when it was beyond the power of criticism to find

fault, was diffident of her own powers, and cautious of bringing into open day either her inclinations or her opinions, yet acute, and endued with the most genuine and lively feelings, she felt more than she expressed, and knew more than she displayed.

Lady Charlotte, the spoiled Child, or a self-willed Mother, the victim at once of violence and indulgence, unconscious of the very meaning of self-government, estimating herself highly, confident, with fiery passions, and a cold heart, was quick to conceive, and ready to exhibit; but her acquirements were wholly superficial: it was the reputation, and not the acquisition of knowledge that was her aim. The mortification of others was the aliment of her happiness; the mortification of Isabella was peculiarly so: the indiscreet emulations of education had already established a rivalry between

them, and however stoutly Lady Charlotte might deny it to others, she could not conceal from herself, that her three years' seniority had not secured to her even the simple advantage over Isabella of being farther advanced in the various lessons that had been imposed upon each ; she knew that Isabella excelled her in most of the shewy parts of education, to which she made the most pretence, and that in spite of the impediments that the modesty and feeling of Isabella threw in the way of its manifestation, her superiority would make itself felt whenever a comparison was instituted between them. Hence she had always both hated and feared her. Their personal attractions partook of the difference of their characters. Lady Charlotte was a Goddess.—Isabella was a Grace : passion flashed from the dark eyes of Lady Charlotte, love beamed from the

intelligent azure of Isabella's—the soft voluptuousness of Lady Charlotte's browner tint intoxicated the senses, the modest purity of Isabella's fairness gave repose to affection : Lady Charlotte might make a man mad ; Isabella could only make him happy.

The moment was now arrived when the powers of each were to be tried by competition.

The gloss of novelty was something worn off from Lady Charlotte — she had been seen ; — she had been criticised ;—she had been appreciated, and —she had not been chosen !—she felt this.—She felt it the more when the garland which had not been offered to her acceptance, might any moment be placed on the brow of Isabella. They were relations, they were intimate acquaintance, they were nominally friends, and Lady Charlotte made use of the prerogatives of the latter character to

draw the portrait of her rival with the pencil of knowledge.

“Who can know her better than I do? Dear, sweet girl! I wonder how she will succeed in the world? That odious Lady Jane has so bowed the poor thing’s spirit, that she has scarcely left her the power of knowing black from white. All that she does is so sweet! — so good! — so in rule! — that I am terribly afraid she will be thought dull; but she *is not* dull, I can assure you. Yet, if the truth must be spoken, there is something very like dullness in her feelings. None of that *devoûment* which marks the existence of superior spirits. Hers is not a superior spirit. How peaceably will she pass through life! While I—” The inference was easily made, and all acute feelers declared for Lady Charlotte. But more particularly did she desire to fasten this inference upon

the imagination of Mr. Willoughby — the handsome, the fashionable, the agreeable, the rich Mr. Willoughby! — the desired of all beholders who had daughters to marry, and of those who wished to become wives themselves.

The dazzling charms of Lady Charlotte had powerfully attracted him: he seemed to be on the point of surrendering to manners so animated, and a display so imposing as scarcely to leave admiration an option: yet the magical words had not been spoken — he was still without the fatal circle — and a more powerful enchantress might rend asunder in a moment all the spells which it had cost Lady Charlotte so much pains and art to weave.

CHAP. III.

“Much may be said on both sides.”

SIR ROGER DE COVERLEY.

“THE good horse is mine,” said Lord Burghley to Mr. Lascelles: “Willoughby weds, and the fair Isabella is the bride.”

“How do you prove this, my Lord?” asked Mr. Lascelles.

“Oh! as l’ami de famille, I am in the secret. Besides, I have this moment parted from Willoughby, radiant with joy and triumph.”

“Triumph !” repeated Mr. Lascelles : “ what, over his own inclinations ? I have lost my money, but I shall keep my opinion. I still maintain that he takes the woman he approves, rather than the one whom he admires.”

“The choice does him honour,” replied Lord Burghley.

“Do you mean to call him a fool, my Lord ?”

“Is it folly, in an engagement for life, to prefer that which will retain its excellence through every period of it, to that which will only charm for a day ?”

“I lost my money on a contrary calculation,” replied Mr. Lascelles ; “and on what can approbation fasten in a school-room automaton, the creature of Mamma and la Governante ? One who has been bribed to show no will of her own before matrimony, by the

hopes of never submitting to that of another afterwards?"

"You do not know Isabella," said Lord Burghley. "Yes, I do," replied Mr. Lascelles. "I know her for a miracle of education! So much accomplishment, so much wisdom, so much propriety, at eighteen, is an artificial monster, that revolts me more than could the most hideous incongruities of nature."

"Oh!" returned Lord Burghley, "if imperfection is your taste, Lady Jane's education has left enough of that to satisfy any man. You might pursue your favourite plan of reform, even if this monster of perfection had fallen to your lot. I speak of natural qualities, not artificial adjuncts; and I repeat, that you do not know Isabella."

"Better than she does herself, poor innocent!" replied Mr. Lascelles. She would not do a naughty thing for the

world! Oh no! But she knows not how much undue restraint Nature has to indemnify herself for; nor how far the bow must be bent the contrary way before it can attain its natural perpendicular. Besides, with all her timid bashfulness, I have seen a sparkle in the eye, and an arch play about the mouth, that tell me that Mrs. Willoughby and Miss Hastings will probably have nothing in common but the person."

"You would then prefer," said Lord Burghley, "the eccentricities, — the petulancies, — the stoutly-declared will of Lady Charlotte, to the even course of propriety, and yielding spirit of Isabella?"

"Oh! for propriety and yielding, I give her no more credit than for the colour of her gown; the one is imposed and the other chosen by Lady Jane. The taste and the temper of

women never declare themselves till after they are married. But for what is really their own, who would not exchange the softest smile that ever mantled over the ruby lips of Isabella, for one of those love-inspiring, though disdainful glances, that dart from the eye of the fire-souled Charlotte?"

"I would not," said Lord Burghley, with emphasis, "if the suffrage of a sexagenary may have any weight; and it is plain that Willoughby would not. He may boast a little more penetration than you lay claim to, my friend; and probably may have seen enough of the taste and the temper also of the virgin, to resolve to shun the wife. And had not Dunston been hoodwinked by something more than love, he might have seen the same, but he will find it out some of these days; for I have more news for you — Willoughby does not only marry Isabella

Hastings, but Dunston weds Lady Charlotte Stanton, and that in a fortnight."

"What, our nouveau Riche?" exclaimed Mr. Lascelles. "And is the haughty Charlotte come to this? Yet I thank you for your news, my Lord: it has saved me some useless compassion. I was just going to propose that Mr. Willoughby should be hanged on the next willow tree, as a recreant knight; but, if the lady is not induced to hang herself in despair, I do not know why the false swain should be hung *in terrorem*. When the consolation is so near, and in *such a form*, the injury cannot have been great."

"The injury," returned Lord Burghley, "is just as many thousands as Mr. Willoughby's income exceeds Mr. Dunston's, and no more."

CHAP. IV.

“ He offer’d the jewels, and gold in store ;
So she gave her hand—and they said no more.”

OLD BALLAD.

“ My dear Isabella,” said Mr. Willoughby,” as he sat playing with the shining ringlets of his young bride, “you are all that I can wish. The sweetness of your temper, and the elegance of your appearance, secure my happiness. Let me always see you thus good-humoured and well-dressed, and I shall have nothing to ask.”

Such, in the estimation of Mr. Willoughby, were the boundaries of matrimonial happiness, and such the means of securing it; and in marrying Isabella Hastings, he believed that he had given a pregnant proof how discreetly he could conduct this most important transaction of life. Ten years' experience in the *ways of the world*, unchecked by parental restraint, and borne above the control of circumstances by the powers of an affluent fortune, had allowed Mr. Willoughby to taste of every stream that is supposed to flow from the fountain of pleasure; and at two and thirty he was inclined, with a much wiser man, to pronounce that all was vanity.

It is not, however, that in exhausting the relish for life, that we get rid of our existence; and at the age to which Mr. Willoughby had yet only arrived, he might reasonably reckon

upon a long remainder, for the enjoyment of which it was the part of prudence to provide some substitute for the evanescent delights which had escaped his grasp. The provision to which he had recourse was matrimony, and he set about it with a precaution, and a spirit of calculation for which he gave himself the more credit, as it was the first instance of his life in which he had exercised either of those qualities. They did for him all that, perhaps, could be hoped for from such counsellors : they rather secured him from the mischiefs of the state than procured for him its pleasures. He had been too often in love to suffer love alone to decide his choice : he had gathered the flower and had found the serpent under it, and he rather sought to shun the rocks by which he believed himself to be surrounded, than hoped to attain that fairy land, where

every sun is bright, and every gale is perfume.

In having seen much of the wives of others, he concluded that he must have learnt what to avoid in choosing his own,—for *once* he resolved to be wise, and, alike to the surprise of his associates, and to his own, he stemmed the current of passion which was carrying him rapidly towards Lady Charlotte, and, under the gentler auspices of approbation and reason, he married Miss Hastings.

In her birth and her beauty he found all that could justify his selection to the world, and believing that education had given her all the qualities that would justify it to himself, he looked no further; naturally concluding that what was itself so lovely, must be to him an object of love.

The motives that had determined Isabella in the acceptance of Mr. Wil-

loughby, if they were not more natural than those which had decided his choice in her favour, were at least more simple.

The earliest impression that had been made on the mind of Isabella was, that she had the best and most sedulous of mothers, and the next was the intended purpose of all these cares and pains. Why had all the honest impulses of nature been held down that the surface might not lose its smoothness, or the figure its proportion, but for the one great end of female existence? and that this end should be accomplished in Lady Jane's family, by the distinguished matrimonial establishment of all and each of the daughters? This had been the stimulant to industry, the promised reward of obedience. Isabella well understood all this, and knew that a failure in the attainment of the object so long, and so

assiduously looked forward to, would not be pitied in her as a misfortune, but would be punished as a fault.

She therefore held herself ready to be sacrificed at the shrine of Plutus, whenever the maternal sacrificer should give the word.

Isabella indeed neither thought of the god, nor the sacrificer, nor the sacrifice. It was not by these names that she designated the immorality that she was prompt to commit — she called the whole thing “being established; and being established as Mamma thought best.”—Thus, when in hearing of the proposals of Mr. Willoughby she found the purpose for which she had been so carefully educated likely to be so soon and so eligibly answered, nothing occurred to her, but to acquiesce in the opinion which she had heard confidently expressed by others, that there was no-

thing to be done but to accept the hand that was offered her, and to rejoice that it was offered by a man whom she knew to have been the object of the hopes and fears of half her acquaintance.

She married: and was then at leisure to discover how far the having in possession all the requisites to matrimonial happiness of which she had ever heard, could in fact produce the result that had been promised from them.

Had Lady Jane been equally successful in petrifying the feelings as she had been in controlling the actions of her daughter, Isabella might never have discovered any error in the calculation which had made the destiny of her life. If she could have confined her affection to rich shawls and splendid jewels; if she could have gloated on the elegance and variety of her equipage; or have exulted in her

well-fancied liveries, or her exquisitely decorated mansion, she might have been — no! — I will not profane the word — she would no more have been a happy woman than she would have been a rational being; but she might have been one of those animals who have no existence but in their senses, who sport and flutter in a mid-day sun, and who are chilled into annihilation by a passing cloud.

But the heart and understanding of Isabella alike forbade such a degradation. Nor could either one or the other have secured her happiness, had the splendors of life been presented to her by the hand of age, of folly, or of vice. As the gift of Mr. Willoughby, indeed, it is not to be wondered at if they dazzled her senses and confounded her judgment; if, in the first glow of exultation attendant on the sudden acquisition of all that she had been accustomed to hear spoken of as the

ne plus ultra of life, she did not distinguish how little she held by the sacred bond of that appropriate affection which makes of two individuals but one soul, and how much she owed to the incidental circumstance of being the wife of a man of fortune.

Isabella found herself the happiest of women ; and she blessed the prudence and foresight of her mother that had made her so. Hitherto, indeed, she had thought more of the conquest that she had made, than the return that it demanded from herself. She felt assured of the love of Mr. Willoughby, but had not yet asked herself whether she loved him.

It was one of Lady Jane's maxims, that a well-educated girl would of course love the husband who had placed her above the level of her companions, that is, that she would love him "sufficiently." But she could prove by a thousand

arguments that there might be as much indiscretion in too devoted an attachment to a husband, in the wife of a man of fashion, as in the head-long fancy of any love-sick damsel by the side of a purling stream. She could talk learnedly of the various claims that people of distinction had upon their feelings, and their time; — of the duties that they owed to society; — of the immorality of suffering the Aaron's rod of conjugal attachment to swallow up all that we owed to our family: with many more such erudite and original *et cæteras*, as shewed at once the acuteness of the intellect, and the softness of the heart.

Isabella had taken it for granted that she should love the husband that Lady Jane presented to her, and when she saw that husband the handsome and captivating Mr. Willoughby, she had no doubt but that she did love

him, but as yet she knew not what it was to love, nor even the indications that might have assured her that she was beloved. How, otherways, could she have mistaken the even good humour, the laugh, the jest, the assured and easy approach of Mr. Willoughby, for symptoms of a heart trembling for its dearest interests, and doubtful how it should secure them? indeed, as Mr. Willoughby had made himself content with the acceptance of his offers from the mother, rather than sought to secure the affections of the daughter, he had in fact never had one doubt or fear upon the subject. He might have repeated the boast of Cæsar, with a slight variation of phrase, He came, he demanded,—he obtained!—and, pleased with his acquisition, he resembled more a happy victor than a successful lover. But the settlements were now arranged, the equipages chosen, the

jewels presented, and the moment approached, that for a certain time at least, the fiat of fashion decreed that Mr. Willoughby and his bride were to be all the world to each other.

On their marriage they had withdrawn to Mr. Willoughby's house in Hertfordshire ; the season was November, London was empty, and every publick place supplementary to the attractions of the capital, began to be deserted. Mr. Willoughby was no sportsman ; seclusion with so beautiful and innocent a companion as Isabella was a novelty that for the time filled up every wish ; and now indeed might she with reason have believed herself the idol of his affections : and now it was that she resigned her heart to him, so absolutely and so irrecoverably that neither circumstance nor time could henceforth restore it to her keeping. — He seemed but to exist in

her presence ; her wishes were his laws, and so sedulously was her accommodation or her pleasure anticipated, that if she were always to have lived only with Mr. Willoughby, it seemed that hands, and feet, and thought, would have been superfluous to Isabella.

How natural was it for a girl hitherto checked, controled, held down, without a choice even in the colour of a ribbon, or the power of command in the slightest instance, to be at once astonished and intoxicated with her situation : Isabella was both ; but she was something more ; she was abashed with the triumph that she believed she had attained. She could not believe that she owed such excess of happiness to any merits or charms of her own : it was the goodness, the kindness of Mr. Willoughby alone from which it flowed ; and while she loved

him the better for the thought, she became timid lest he should discover some imperfection in her, which might make her less worthy in his eyes, of that ardour of affection, on which she was now sensible that all her future happiness must depend. What now were splendour and riches to her?—to live always with Mr. Willoughby, and *thus* to live with him, bounded her ideas of felicity.

But was it so with Mr. Willoughby?—to him there was a world beyond Beech Wood. The first, the second, the third, nay even the fourth week was past, and neither satiety nor weariness had been felt.—Oh might it always be so!—thought the too well-experienced Mr. Willoughby—and he felt that the charm was broken.

The fifth week was ushered in with, “My dear Isabella, we must not always live so—I must not seclude you

thus from the world — our friends will think that we mean to bury ourselves alive — it is really high time not only to enjoy, but to celebrate our union.”

Isabella thought that the enjoyment was the best celebration — but she did not say so — she was modest and retiring, and knew not how to presume to appropriate wholly to herself what she thought so well suited to make the happiness of many.

“It would indeed be wrong that *you* should live in seclusion,” said she.

“Oh we should neither of us like it,” replied Mr. Willoughby, — and began immediately to write his letters of invitation, desiring Isabella, that she would summon her mother and sisters to their Christmas party.

“We must have Lady Charlotte,” said Mr. Willoughby, “and — dire necessity! — that fool her husband too. That fair cousin of yours, Isabella,

I fear has paid too dear for her whistle."

"Why should you think so?" said Isabella. "I really believe that she likes Mr. Dunston. At least, I am quite sure she chose to marry him; for she always did what she pleased, in spite of my uncle. Lady Stanton would never suffer her to be contradicted."

"Like Dunston!" exclaimed Mr. Willoughby, "oh! no, that's impossible. Lady Charlotte has better taste: take my word for it she knows that Dunston is a low-bred fool; one who disgraces his birth, low as it is. He was a kind of a *pis aller*, I take it."

"What, at one and twenty?" returned Isabella. "With so much beauty, with so many charms, as Lady Charlotte possesses?"

"You young Ladies," said Mr. Willoughby, fondly patting the cheek of Isabella, "attach a great deal of glory

to doing your business quickly. Lady Charlotte, with all her beauty, and all her charms, had seen more than one competitor who had started with her reach the goal before her; and I suspect that she was not unapprehensive of being distanced by her sweet little cousin here," said he, gently drawing Isabella towards him.

Isabella coloured a deep crimson. All the petty jealousies and heart-burnings that had ever been between them rushed into her mind, and a consciousness that she had been complimented on having robbed her cousin of her favourite admirer, completed her confusion.

"You look terribly guilty, my dear Isabella," said Mr. Willoughby. "What! you did not suspect that I was such an adept in the arcana of your sex?"

"Indeed I have no arcana," replied

Isabella, blushing, and even trembling, with the varied emotion, of fear lest she was lowered in the opinion of the man whom she loved, and eagerness to vindicate herself. "I have no arcanæ. Mamma, indeed, wished that I should marry early; but I did not care about it, except to please her."

"I am most happy," said Mr. Willoughby, caressing her, "that it pleased Mamma that you should marry me."

"Oh! but that pleased me too," said Isabella, timidly, and with her eyes cast on the ground.

It would have been well for Mr. Willoughby if at this moment his vanity had stood his friend, and given the whole meaning of this compliment to his personal qualities; but he had known too many machinating mothers and obedient daughters, not to allow his "rent-roll," — "his princely mansion in the country," — and his "ex-

cellent town-house," their full share in the pleasure so ingenuously expressed by Isabella. He knew that choice had had no part in her acceptance of his hand ; and while he gave her credit for softness and truth, he regarded her as too much the creature of circumstances to feel his self-love much flattered by an attachment which he believed that she would have felt equally for any man who had been her husband. He emboldened not, therefore, this first indirect acknowledgment of love on the part of Isabella by any answering tenderness on his side, but pursuing his arrangement of the purposed party,

“ I know,” said he, “ we may have Sir Charles Seymour. He promised to hold himself in readiness for the first summons I should give when his visit would not be an intrusion, and I suspect he may think it long of com-

ing ; and we will have your old play-fellow Burghley ; he is a good-natured spirited creature, and as full of tricks as a kitten ; and with George Stanton, and one or two more, the house will be full. If Eagle's Crag were a little nearer we would adjourn thither, and enact such a Christmas as has not been seen since the days of good Queen Bess ; but it would be a bad joke to travel into Westmoreland for the purpose, so we must do as well as we can in the more limited space of Beech Wood."

Isabella was acquiescent ; the house was filled ; and she felt more from deprivation than accession, that she was no longer its sole inhabitant. But how could she wish it otherways when Mr. Willoughby had so many other claims upon his attention ? Hers was not that sickly love which droops if it is not fed every hour in the day with sugar plums. She could indeed a

little wonder that he did not appear to regret the uninterrupted intercourse which he had once seemed to estimate so highly; that she heard no more of the exquisite bliss of being “all to each other;” the joy of being “he the relator, she sole auditress.” She perceived that there were others to whom he could “re-late,” and by whose attention he seemed to think himself well repaid. She felt no such changes in herself; yet she was not the less obliged to attend more to others. And perhaps this was the case with Mr. Willoughby also; only he had more command over himself than she had; he could appear pleased with what, perhaps, after all, he only endured:—it was a debt due to society. She admired him the more for being thus able to discharge it; she tried to imitate him, looking for her indemnification when they should be once again alone.

CHAP. V.

“ Let observation, with extensive view,
Remark each anxious toil, each eager strife,
And watch the busy scenes of crowded life ;
Then say how hope and fear, desire and hate,
O’erspread with snares the clouded maze of fate.”

JOHNSON.

IN the mean time the hours passed not unpleasantly ; — the whole party seemed to be in good humour with themselves and each other ; Lady Jane was at the acme of delight. The splendour, the elegance, the festivity with which Isabella was surrounded, she regarded only as the fruits of her

own sagacity and management. She was willing even to undervalue the personal attractions of Isabella, that she might exalt her own talents in having made them produce more than their price.

“ You see, girls,” she would observe to her daughters, “ that it is not superior beauty that always succeeds best ; —there is no denying that Lady Charlotte is handsomer than Isabella — at least more imposing — she suffers the powers of her charms to be less disputed, but what has all this done for her ? after three years’ exhibition on her part, and all the manœuvring possible on Lady Stanton’s, what is it come to at last ? she has married, — what ? — a man of warehouses and manufactories. Not that I look down upon trade—God forbid ! it is the sinews of the Nation, and the best houses in the peerage have been beholden to it.

But this Mr. Dunston? — so recent ! so fresh from the shop ! his manners so little purified ! his clumsy opulence reminds one every moment of his only distinction, and the lowness of his mind shows how little worthy he is even of that. I am astonished my brother would consent to such an union ; but he has such a tribe of daughters, and his estate is so encumbered ! — the fault was in Lady Charlotte ; and it all springs from the same source — education ! education ! — I always foretold how it would be, and now I hope you will acknowledge that I was right, and be sensible of the obligations that you all owe to my care. 'Three years' experience has shown that a man of fashion would not have so self-willed a wife, and Lady Charlotte was glad to take up with the man that would. I hope that she will be duly thankful to him, but what would Lady Stanton give

to call Mr. Willoughby her son-in-law."

The young ladies could not but allow that Lady Jane had done excellently well for one daughter, and secretly hoping that she would be equally successful for the other two, felt a fresh flow of spirits, and anticipated enjoyment, as they looked around on ottomans and candelabras, on gorgeous liveries and elegant carriages. Of the two latter ingredients in matrimonial happiness it must be acknowledged that Lady Charlotte was by no means deficient; nor could it be discovered by any outward sign or gesture, except sometimes a slight movement in her beautiful lip when addressed by Mr. Dunston, that she thought there was any thing wanting to make her the object of envy—never had her brow been seen so cloudless, — never had her manners been so

equal ; every childish or school room emulation appeared to be forgotten. Isabella was her “ dear cousin ”— her “ chere amie : ”—and it was “ we,” and “ us ”—and “ you and I know, my dear,”—with every other phrase of familiar intercourse and appropriate liking, that bespoke the friendship of near relations and chosen companions.

How wonderfully is Lady Charlotte improved by her marriage ! thought Isabella — I am quite convinced that she has done the thing she liked ; and now that she is at ease, as to her establishment in life, we shall see no more of those hot and cold fits, those uncertainties and caprices which used to make her so intolerable — as we must be much together, the change will be greatly to my advantage.

Yet when Isabella heard and saw Mr. Dunstan, certain doubts came across her mind !—“ Was he not all that

Lady Charlotte had been accustomed to ridicule and despise?—his plebeian birth, his ludicrous deference for all that was great, even the creeping devotion which he paid to his titled wife, she should have supposed would have been of all things revolting to her high and disdainful spirit.” These doubts were not weakened by a certain turn of Lady Charlotte’s eye, which Isabella knew well, and which, although it appeared now to be put more than usually under control, seemed to say that Lady Charlotte’s present forbearance rested on no sound foundation; nor did she think this the less for the pains which Lady Charlotte took to magnify all Mr. Dunstan’s supposable good qualities, and her eager recommendation of him to Isabella’s approbation. Isabella suspected that so much unnecessary pains, had the merits been real, must arise either from

Lady Charlotte's consciousness that they did not exist, or for the purpose of keeping the object of them in good humour, as a froward child is bribed to behave well in company. In all their driving or riding parties Lady Charlotte laid claim to Mr. Willoughby, while she would consign Isabella to Mr. Dunston, with "do, dear Isabella, accompany Mr. Dunston, you are such a favourite with him!"—but Isabella would not be so consigned; and there were others who would have disputed the consignment, had she been willing to have submitted to it. There was the young and mirthful Burghley, — the companion of her childhood, the nephew and heir to her never-failing friend Lord Burghley; — there was Sir Charles Seymour, the well-bred, the fashionable Sir Charles Seymour; whose civilities, always well-placed, were never obtrusive; who

outraged no decorum, affected no superiority, was at the disposal of every body, and passed for the best-tempered and most obliging person in the world. With such aids-de-camp Isabella found no difficulty in eluding the awkward attempts of Mr. Dunston to establish himself as her professed attendant. She had always to plead a prior engagement to Sir Charles Seymour; or some wild trick of the boyish Burghley threw him so intirely out of his play, that, as he sometimes observed, with mingled resentment and surprise, “Mrs. Willoughby had never, no not *once, tried* his curricule, though he might say, without a boast, that it was the first curricule *going*, and so said his friend the Duke; and Lord L. ‘absolutely could not conjecture how he could get such a one: nobody else had any thing like it;’ — and no doubt that was the simple truth; for

nobody but himself knew how to give proper directions about such things ; few people indeed would or could go to the expence necessary to have such a *complete thing* ;—if Mrs. Willoughby would but once try it, she would soon see the difference ; for, certainly, though every thing that Mr. Willoughby had was elegant, fashionable, and dashing enough, the ease of the thing was what he did not understand, indeed he might repeat it, that nobody did but himself.”

“ Happy Lady Charlotte !” cried Burghley, in a tone which made Lady Charlotte frown, and every body else laugh.

But although Lady Charlotte had the mortification to see that Mr. Dunstan was more truly appreciated by her simple cousin than she had hoped might have been the case, and that, still worse, this cousin was also more

highly estimated by others than her invidious praises, and the air of protecting superiority which she assumed towards her, were likely to have allowed, yet she was sufficiently successful in drawing almost the whole of Mr. Willoughby's attention to herself. The field was, indeed, entirely open to her. Isabella was, by all the laws of fashion and hospitality, quite out of the question; and her sisters were the sisters of Mr. Willoughby also; so that, farther than, "Pray, Burghley, take care of Isabella," — "George, you must be Harriet's beau," it could not be expected that his gallantry would extend in that direction. And thus, as Lady Charlotte was left the undisputed property of Mr. Willoughby in every morning excursion, so she became the paramount object of his care, that the evenings should pass in the way most agreeable

to her. A word from her decided between music, dancing, or cards. The latter she usually left to those whom she designated as invalids; amongst which number her husband was invariably one. "Heaven knows," would she say, "he has no music in his soul." "His knowledge in that delicious science was not one of the good parts for which she suffered love for him." "It was a treat to her to sing and play to one who could understand her." She seized therefore generally on the instrument, and calling Mr. Willoughby to her side, sometimes employing him in turning over the leaves of the music-book, and sometimes inducing him to join his voice to hers, she would keep possession of him for hours. In vain would Mr. Burghley declare that Isabella could sing the song better, or Sir Charles Seymour gently inquire, if there were not an-

other instrument? Lady Charlotte was equally deaf to both. "Let us go on," would she say to Mr. Willoughby; and she would say it with so expressive a tone, and a look of so much favour, that it was not in man to say no.

Isabella was too modest even to wish to enter the lists with her; and Lady Jane, who was rather an ambitious than a vain mother, more proud of her own management than pleased with her daughter's acquirements, was careless whether or no Isabella spread her nets, now the fish was caught; and as for her other two daughters, there was no one of the present party whom she could either wish or hope that they would attract.

Mr. Burghley she thought too young, and too dependant; Sir Charles was too wary; and cousin George Stanton was poor, and a gamester.

Nor was there any thing more hopeful in the fleeting guests, who came and went, tarrying but a day. Lady Jane, therefore, let every thing go on without any interruption from her, provided only that she had her rubber at whist. This Isabella always took care to arrange as much to her satisfaction as she possibly could. George Stanton would rather play a half-crown game than none at all, especially as he was sure to find a ready acquiescence from Mr. Willoughby to any bet he could propose; and Mr. Dunstan, who played whist well, and who was not unversed in any of the accumulating advantages of small gains, was always to be had; but Mr. Burghley and Sir Charles Seymour were equally immovable whenever she talked to them of the card table, except she would make one of the party. To this nothing but the necessity of

securing Lady Jane her favourite amusement ever induced her to do; for though she could sacrifice her own pleasure to that of her mother, yet she had in fact but one point of attraction in the whole circle by which she was surrounded.

Of Mr. Willoughby's various ways of pleasing, all were equally new to Isabella. Before marriage she had seen him handsome, gay, acquiescent; she had known him since as a passionate and doating lover; and perhaps in this, the nonage of her reason, she might have been best pleased had she never advanced one step farther in her knowledge;—but there is nothing stationary under the moon. Mr. Willoughby must be something more or less than a lover. Isabella must know him in all the various lights that society throws upon the character. She must see him abide the touch-stone of

moral feeling,—she must hear him recognize the obligations of a responsible being, before she could judge whether or no “her lot was cast in a fair ground,” whether, *indeed*, she had “a goodly heritage.” Of all this, at present, she knew nothing; but she hourly gained some light on subjects so interesting; the social qualities were now under her observation; and Isabella proudly compared her destiny with that of Lady Charlotte’s.

Could there, indeed, be a greater contrast than between the gay, good-humoured, and accommodating Willoughby, and the solemn, morose, and immovable Dunston? — between the intelligent good-breeding of the former, and the pedantic civility of the latter? between him who estimated himself by his personal qualities alone, and him who valued himself only on the weight of his purse? — in a word,

between the gentleman by birth and education, and an upstart who held his place in society by the money he spent there?

It was not, however, necessary that Mr. Willoughby should have had so deep a relief to have brought all his engaging qualities to bear full on the mind of Isabella. Without comparing him with any other, her eye followed him with delight through all the various exercises of the day;—she could have wished herself the object of every civility, or act of good-will, that he showed to each of his guests; and in the evenings she sat intently listening for the sounds of his voice as they sometimes mingled with Lady Charlotte's, or made audible some gay remark, or acute observation; but nothing of jealousy or mistrust made a part of her feelings. To her he was never wanting in a kind word or look,

a gentle pressure of the hand as he passed her, or a fond caress when no eye was upon them. All the time that he gave to Lady Charlotte Isabella knew to be no more than it is customary for the master of the mansion to dedicate to the female guest of the most distinction, yet she could not but wish that all this would come to an end, that the festivities of the joyous Christmas should cease, that they should repair to town,—where, as she knew, they might live much more to themselves if they wished it, so she had not a doubt but that Mr. Willoughby did wish it, as earnestly as she did herself.

CHAP. VI.

“ Oh! how the spring of love resembleth well
Th’ uncertain glory of an April day,
Which now shews all the glory of the Sun,
And by and by, a cloud takes all away.”

SHAKSPEARE.

AT last the desired moment arrived. The party at Beechwood broke up, and Isabella took possession for the first time of her town house: that house which had made so prominent a feature in the enumerated advantages of her projected marriage. Two months before, it is possible that she would not have thought its conse-

quence overrated ; but the novelty of having servants and carriages at her command, of being surrounded by costly mirrors and silken draperies, *all her own property*, as had been so often emphatically insisted upon, was already worn off; her eye was satiated with them, and her ear weary of hearing of their omnipotency. Her heart had spoken, and it required as the *sine qua non* of her happiness, that she should be the first, the declared, the undisputed object of her husband's affections.

We are again alone, thought she. Again we shall be every thing to each other.

But the days of Hertfordshire returned no more !

Mr. Willoughby had morning occupations and evening engagements, in which Isabella had no share. There was certainly nothing extraordinary in

this, and they were also not unfrequently together; but they were also often apart, and apart when it appeared to Isabella that it only depended upon Mr. Willoughby's wish that they might have been together. But Isabella would not allow herself to believe that there was any thing wrong in a creature who was to her so charming: she was rather inclined to doubt the force of her own attractions. She was unused to flattery, and the rigid manner in which all that she had been taught had been invariably judged, made her more alive to her own imperfections than to the points in which she really excelled others. How little, she thought, could she hope to be sufficient in companionship to such a man as Mr. Willoughby! She half envied the volubility of Lady Charlotte. He was all kindness! all goodness! and if more variety was

necessary to him than to her, it proceeded only from the superiority of his acquirements, his more extended occupations, the larger number of human beings to whom he could give pleasure, or from whom he could receive it, and the ever-recurring opportunities of such communication. But if she had less of his company than during the first weeks of their residence in Hertfordshire, if she had not so much of it as even in London she thought might have fallen to her share, other proofs of his love seemed to arise, to supply the place of those which she, perhaps, too sensibly regretted.

Her entrance into the fairy palace of which she was henceforth to be the deity, had been hailed by the most gay and splendid festivities, professedly given to celebrate the event of her nuptials. Nor was the feast that was

spread before her the feast of Tantalus. Her kind, her fashionable husband, had said, “pluck, and eat;” and in the unbounded indulgence, and the exuberance of pleasure, that Mr. Willoughby pressed upon Isabella, she still persuaded herself that she recognised the fervor of that passion which it so much flattered her heart and her vanity to believe that she had excited.

She felt, however, something of disappointment, when she observed that she was more unrestrained, than fostered — more allowed to please herself, than the object of pleasure to her husband; and that, provided he met her “well-dressed” and “good-humoured,” amidst a score of “his friends,” at his own, or some other festive board, he seemed little to concern himself how she disposed of herself in the interim. She could not now wholly solve this mystery by any

doubt of her own powers of charming. She was now come forth into open day, and she had hourly proofs that the more she was seen the more highly was she appreciated. There *were* countenances that brightened with delight whenever she appeared; there *were* those who hung with rapture on every word that she uttered. She made dangerous comparisons: she might have felt dangerous regrets, had she not fortunately entertained in reality that passion for her husband, that she so mistakenly imagined that he must feel for her. It was this sacred feeling which, like the charmed gift of some benignant fairy, bore Isabella safe through the dangers by which she was surrounded: for as yet Isabella had no principles. Between the worldly maxims of Lady Jane, and the “grand sentiments” of la Gouvernante, Isabella felt herself perpetually

impelled different ways. Her morality was a "chateau en Espagne," — beautiful in its parts, but destitute of the proportions of virtue, or the stability of truth. Without one evil propensity, with a vague notion that nothing was lovely but what was right, her good name below, and her eternal happiness above, were at the mercy of the accidents of the day, — of the forbearance of others, rather than secured by any guardianship of her own.

The perils of her situation seemed to increase hourly. Isabella could no longer conceal from herself that she was the last object on whom the attentions of Mr. Willoughby were bestowed; that her approval or admiration was the approval or admiration that he was the least solicitous to secure. It was no longer to her that the eye of Mr. Willoughby was directed in the hope of being understood; it was not to her

that the half-word which implies mutual understanding was addressed; the smile of intelligence had ceased to pass between them; nor did it seem that either her gaiety or her gravity retained any influence over the feelings of Mr. Willoughby. Could this growing indifference proceed from satiety, or preference to another? Each alternative was nearly equally painful; and the state of mind which the continual debating this anxious point produced in Isabella, was peculiarly fatal to her interests; it robbed her of her gaiety, and induced such a mistrust of her power to please as gave a timidity and reserve in her intercourse with her husband, which led Mr. Willoughby to the falsest conclusions as to the extent of her understanding, and the feelings of her heart. Although a wife she scarcely dared to express an opinion; and she ventured not to obtrude

her love. The change was strange and direful ; and Isabella drooped under it until she seemed almost to realize the imputation of coldness and apathy which Lady Charlotte industriously laboured to affix to her character.

CHAP. VII.

“Then she plots, then she ruminates, then she devises; and what they think in their heart they may effect, they will break their heart but they will effect.”

SHAKSPEARE.

It was now that the bold game of that daring and unprincipled woman began to display itself. All of either fear or hatred that the rivalry of their childhood and youth had engendered in the breast of Lady Charlotte, was mild to what she had felt when at the moment that she believed she had secured to herself the hand of Mr.

Willoughby, she saw it wrested from her by the machinations of Lady Jane Hastings, and given to the person in the world over whom she most desired to triumph. His distinction had not only excited her ambition, and flattered her vanity, but it had engaged her fancy; and had she had a heart to have been touched, it might probably have reached even that. She almost persuaded herself that this had really been the case; and willingly mistook the rage of disappointed pride for the mortification of slighted love. What vengeance could be too great for offences so atrocious? According to her own statement of the case, she had a heavy account, indeed, to adjust with Mr. Willoughby, and she promised herself most solemnly that he should not escape from her toils till he had paid the uttermost farthing;—but it was not with Mr. Willoughby alone

that she had to reckon. If he had to account to her, she had to account to the world. She had given the pledge of superior charms, and superior pretensions, not very modestly veiled, that she “would not be one of the common herd of young ladies, who flutter and glitter for a few seasons, and are heard of no more.”—To continue Lady Charlotte another winter would be annihilation!—to behold Isabella established before her would be distraction! and yet she was conscious that a few more passing months, and these double horrors of her fate would be realized. At this agonizing moment Mr. Dunstan appeared like a guardian angel. Lady Charlotte paused not an instant. Assured of the reality and extent of his wealth, and confident of her own power to make it take whatever form would please her most, she thought not of his birth, his manners, or his

mind. To prove to the world that she had not looked up to Mr. Willoughby with a hope that had been disappointed, and to precede Isabella in the matrimonial career, engrossed all the powers of her understanding, and controlled every feeling of her soul. Motives so interwoven with all that she felt, made the distinctions of life, — could even suspend her natural character, — could make the fiery Lady Charlotte mild, — the disdainful daughter of an Earl smile upon the son of a manufacturer!

On this occasion Mr. Dunstan could smile too; for he was not only enamoured of the beauty of Lady Charlotte, but he also was going to gratify the ruling passion of *his* soul, if a soul he had — he was going to be allied to nobility! — It was not therefore to be wondered at, if, with such incitements on each side, that Mr. Dunstan and Lady Charlotte pressed forward with

such eagerness to the goal of matrimony, as to distance the more methodical and philosophical pace of Mr. Willoughby, who was only “going to be married.”

Lady Charlotte was a bride three whole months before Isabella became so, and so ably did she know how to turn the tables on Mr. Willoughby, that her friends boldly asserted, that it was her refusal of his hand that had given it to Isabella.

Isabella also had *her* partisans, and her flatterers. The fact was as stoutly denied on the one side, as asserted on the other. The advantage of the victory was not sufficient without the glory of it; and that both belonged to Isabella, the matrimonial destiny of Lady Charlotte was appealed to as an undeniable proof.

It could not be the result of *choice*; —“what judgment could step from this to that?” —“it was a *dernier resort*” —

a "*pis aller*" — a flat acknowledgment that Lady Charlotte had been rejected, and Isabella taken. Lady Charlotte was not so destitute of *friends* as to be left in ignorance that such unpleasant truths were abroad. She tossed her lofty head on high, and affected to despise them, but they shed fresh venom upon the already rankling wounds of mortified vanity; and while she felt herself compelled to rebut such degrading insinuations, by putting a strong rein on the contempt and dislike that she felt for Mr. Dunstan, her hatred to Isabella, and her desire of vengeance upon Mr. Willoughby, were multiplied tenfold. To shew him how ill he had chosen, and to sting him to the heart, became the master movement of her soul, and provided that he was miserable, and Isabella degraded, she cared not at what price or evil to herself.

Living in the same society, and associating with the familiarity of relations, there was scarcely a day in which Lady Charlotte had not the means to mortify Isabella, or to spread her allurements before Mr. Willoughby. Isabella felt that she was held down in her presence ; yet all was done with so much apparent carelessness and freedom from design, that she knew not of what to complain — all seemed to proceed from her rival's superiority in the art of charming — and this superiority seemed to be hourly establishing itself more firmly in the only place where it would have given Isabella much pain to have allowed it. This was, however, a new feeling. Isabella had hitherto felt herself strong in the preference that had been given to her over Lady Charlotte by Mr. Willoughby, and it was not likely that she would, in the present circumstances, yield to her

whatever she might have done to another, without a struggle.

Something beyond the general satisfaction that her self-love had experienced on being chosen by so distinguished a person as Mr. Willoughby, had been felt by Isabella, from believing that she had been deliberately and particularly preferred to Lady Charlotte—her flatterers had not left her ignorant of the fact, and the triumph had been boasted of by others, until poor Isabella had been too much a partaker of it. On this weak side, her boasted education had not only left her vulnerable, but had even been calculated to lay low all those defences that the natural rectitude of her mind might have furnished her with. To excel Lady Charlotte was a precept: — to take pleasure in seeing her humbled was a natural consequence which had not been guarded against.

She knew that she had always excelled her in all their youthful competitions, and she considered her own superiority as no longer to be disputed, when, in the question who was most worthy to charm a man of taste and refinement, Mr. Willoughby had decided in her favour. — Of all her acquaintance Lady Charlotte was perhaps the last of whom Isabella could have been persuaded that she should have become jealous.

How acute was then the pang that wrung her heart, when from wondering, doubting, fearing — she could no longer withstand the conviction, that although the conversation of other females might be preferred to her own, that of Lady Charlotte was preferred to all the rest?

The vanity, the pride, the ambition, and the selfishness, that the mode of education to which Isabella had been

subjected is so peculiarly fitted to engender, were on this conviction called into action in a moment; — and as quickly did the injunction, which she had so often received, “*not to be wanting to herself*,” occur to her recollection.

“What is this potent charm, thought she, that is to sink me into nothingness? Lady Charlotte has known my superiority, and she shall again know it! — It shall be seen whether I cannot rival her in all that seems to make her so charming in the eyes of him who no longer sees any charms in me. — My dress may be as studied — my taste as fastidious as hers; — like her I can be capricious — and like her I can prove my right to homage by encouraging numerous worshippers. Oh Willoughby! — and can this be the woman you prefer? — as a wife you rejected her; for what do you now seek her?”

The uncontrollable tears of bitter anguish rolled down the cheeks of the miserable Isabella; the hasty sparks of anger and revenge were extinguished—she trembled at her own thoughts, she shrunk from her own purposes—the rectitude of her heart revolted from the maxims by which she had been taught to regulate her conduct. It cannot be right, thought she, to do wrong;—and would it not be wrong to do that from resentment, which my softer feelings condemn? yet what can be wrong that shall appear acceptable to my husband? what can be unfair that can aid me to preserve a heart so justly due to me?

CHAP. VIII.

“The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.”

SHAKSPEARE.

ISABELLA's carriage was at the door ; she was going out. “Drive,” said she, “to Mrs. Nesbit's.” “She is the best woman in the world, thought she, as the carriage moved on. I have heard Mamma say so a hundred times ; and she knows what is right, and what the world will think to be right. And then she loves me so well, and is so ready to enter into all that concerns

me. And she does not love Lady Charlotte. And she is so acute, that I shall have no occasion to say three words before she will see into the bottom of the grievance. How often has she penetrated, nay, even anticipated my thoughts. I cannot have a better counsellor." Again tears filled the eyes of Isabella. "What am I about to do?" thought she. Shall I confess that I fear Lady Charlotte's influence over my husband? Shall I complain of that husband? I ought better *to consult my own dignity*: or rather, I ought better to consult my own heart. I will call upon Mrs. Nesbitt, but I will not say a word of my unhappiness; it may not be so confirmed as I think. Yet last night! Well, I will see farther."

As Isabella made this wise resolution, she entered Mrs. Nesbitt's boudoir, and was received by that friendly lady with a violent exclamation —

“ My dearest Mrs. Willoughby! how pale you are! And there are tears absolutely in your eyes! You, my dear! can you have any thing to afflict or vex you?”

“ Why should you suppose that I have either?” said Isabella: “ I was up late; and the high wind —

“ Don’t tell me of being up late, and the high wind,” interrupted Mrs. Nesbitt, with the familiarity which her age and her intimacy gave her a right to assume in her intercourse with Isabella. “ My dear child, I have known you too well and too long not to read your very soul in that ingenuous countenance of yours. I know what is the matter. Yes, yes, I saw it all; although I was resolved not to say a word till you mentioned it to me. Never was there such a flirtation scene! It was quite abominable! And that passive husband to

stand by and bear it all! as if an earl's daughter could not do wrong. But the eccentricities of the beautiful Lady Charlotte, I suppose, are to be the excuse for all. She is to be judged by no common rules, I presume."

Isabella burst into tears.

"And was it indeed so evident? And did you indeed see what I thought that no one but myself had seen — that is, had observed?"

"We must live in a better-natured world than we do for that to have been the case," returned Mrs. Nesbitt. "Yes, it *was* evident enough; that must be confessed; but perhaps not so much noticed by any one as me, because there can be few who take so much interest in you as I do, my love."

"And were you not surprised, my dear madam, that the very woman whom —"

“Your husband *refused* six months ago,” interrupted Mrs. Nesbitt, “should be the object of so much gallantry to that very husband? That is your question, my dear. And my answer is, *no*: not in the least. Nay, never lift up those beautiful blue eyes in such astonishment. What man, with one grain of understanding, would have made Lady Charlotte his wife? And what man, who has his five senses, but must admire her?”

“Was it then only Mr. Willoughby’s understanding that chose me?” said Isabella mournfully.

“Look in the glass, my love,” replied the obliging Mrs. Nesbitt, “and answer yourself, even though you do look pale.”

“Ah! madam,” said Isabella, blushing, “I have heard such flattery before, from lips even more persuasive than yours; but what avail charms,

the influence of which is so fleeting?"

"The influence will not be fleeting, if you know how to make use of it,"—returned Mrs. Nesbitt.

"Oh, teach me," cried Isabella, "that most valuable of secrets, and take my everlasting blessing with you!"

"Why, my little novice in the ways of the world, and in the ways of the lords of it," said Mrs. Nesbitt, "can it be necessary that you should come to me, though I were as wise as Ethan and Heman, and Chalcol or Darda, or even Solomon himself, for what any woman who has been married four months could tell you?—Is there indeed so little of the female in that dear heart, unhackneyed as it is, as not to tell you the weapons with which you ought to fight such a warfare as this?"

"I am afraid," said Isabella consciously, "that there may have arisen

some such thoughts as those to which you allude ; but I endeavoured to repress them. Would not the weapons be unholy ones ? — could I expect a fortunate issue from their use ?”

“ Why not ?” said Mrs. Nesbitt. “ Will not the end sanctify the means ? If you mean no harm, can you do any ?”

“ I don’t know,” said Isabella.

“ You don’t know !” replied Mrs. Nesbitt. “ Why then, my dear, I must tell you, that your boasted education has left you ignorant of the science of life.”

“ But, my dear madam,” said Isabella, “ I do not perfectly understand you. What would you have me do ?”

“ Out-dress, out-shine, out-talk Lady Charlotte,” replied Mrs. Nesbitt. “ Let Mr. Willoughby see that in the eyes of others you are her superior ; — let him hear you talked of for the ele-

gance of the parties you give, — of the charm that you throw over every society into which you enter; — let him see that others can fall in love with you, and he will fall in love too.”

“ I thought,” said Isabella, with great simplicity, “ that he had already fallen in love with me.”

“ Nothing like it, my dear,” returned Mrs. Nesbitt. “ He knew that there was no occasion to be at that trouble;—he negociated with mamma; he did not woo the daughter.”

“ But he has known me since,” said Isabella meekly.

“ Yes, my dear,” returned Mrs. Nesbitt; “ he knows you to be one of those excellently good wives who can see nothing wrong in whatever their husbands do, and therefore do not fear to do whatever they chuse.”

“ I do not know that Mr. Willoughby does any thing that is wrong,”

said Isabella ; “ and I am quite sure that he does not *mean* any thing that is so. If he find other people more amusing than I am, that is my fault perhaps, not his.”

“ It is your fault, my dear,” replied Mrs. Nesbitt, “ but it is a fault that you may easily amend.— Mr. Willoughby with all his faults”——

“ With all his faults!” interrupted Isabella, “ I was told before I married that Mr. Willoughby had no faults, and I know not that he has any now ; he is indulgence itself, and I have not a complaint to make, except — but I know you will laugh at me — except that he leaves me too much at liberty to please myself.”

“ I do, indeed, believe,” returned Mrs. Nesbitt, “ it is a fault of which not another wife in the liberties of London and Westminster would complain except yourself.”

“ And shall I not love such a man?” said Isabella, fervently.

“ To be sure, my dear!” said Mrs. Nesbitt. “ Who would say to the contrary?—I beg I may not be misunderstood;—do not conceive that I am counselling you to rebellion, or witchcraft, or any other such crying sin! I think you know me better;—you know that I am *quite* religious. There *are* people who call me methodistical;—but I do not mind that;—I go on in the way which I know to be right, and let people think and talk as they please. I assure you, my dear, I live to myself, and my own notions; and to shew you that I am right I can quote Scripture for every thing that I advise; for I shall advise nothing but what shall be for the good of your husband, and your happiness; and you will see in twenty instances that I can quote you out of the Bible, that

where the end is righteous, the means become so too; and in your case they will be strictly so; for what do I advise? — Nothing in the least wrong in itself!—only to let your husband know that you have it in your power to do wrong if you please, that he may look about him, and make him lock up his jewel in his own bosom, lest it should be worn on the finger of another.”

“ Oh! my dear, dear madam,” cried Isabella, “ don’t make such suppositions. I cannot bear them.”

“ Poo!” said Mrs. Nesbitt. “ When he sees that you don’t like to do wrong, will he not love you the better? Besides, all stratagems are fair in war; there would be no living in this world but for these little *detours*; — yes, *detours*. I am really forced to use the word, though you know that I am a true John Bull, and hate the French,

all but their gloves and their silks, and their fashions; yes, I hate their very language; but *roundabouts* is so vulgar! Who could say roundabouts? But there is no harm in the thing, my dear. Witness the good Rebecca's ingenious little plan. She knew that the elder was to serve the younger; but all things are done by *means* in this world, and so she was quite right to make use of what she thought would succeed best. But don't be alarmed; I am not going to wrap you up in the skins of beasts. My very first measure, if it cannot be said to be as open as daylight, shall at least be as brilliant: you shall give a ball."

"Nay now, my dear madam, I am sure that you are laughing at me," said Isabella. "What can my giving a ball have to do with making me acceptable to Mr. Willoughby? He does not love balls. I have heard him

say that he is too old for them ; and I wished at that moment that I did not love dancing so well, lest he should think himself too old for me too."

"He is not too old," replied Mrs. Nesbitt, "to admire the pretty fancies of a pretty woman in the decorations of a ball, my dear. I saw *that* pretty plainly when Lady Charlotte, like the old woman in the fairy-tale, turned all her tradesman husband's eggs and nuts into pearls and diamonds, and astonished the whole world by the taste and splendour of her *debut* in *fête* making. Deuce take the French! their words are always on one's tongue, I think, when one is talking of the *nothings* of life. Yet balls that can fix wavering husbands, or that can keep doubtful ones from wavering, are *not* nothings ; and I saw with half an eye how your fickle swain bowed before the creative powers of the goddess

of the scene. Nay, I heard it too: for, my love, for your sake, I think it no shame to lend an attentive ear to what otherwise would pass without notice. Much good may come from such attentions sometimes. You know that Gideon was sent to listen to what was passing in his enemy's camp, and was encouraged by what he heard there, and so got the victory. Well, as I was saying, it so happened, that just as I had slipped behind some of that magnificent drapery which, while it served to conceal the awkward junction of two of the rooms, was equally an ornament to both, I heard —”

“Pray, my dear, Mrs. Nesbitt, do not tell me what you heard,” said Isabella. “I do not wish you to listen *for my sake*; and I am sure that such results as you seem to have met with can never encourage me.”

“Oh! my dear, I heard no harm,” said Mrs. Nesbitt: “nothing, I dare

say, but what Mr. Willoughby would have said in the hearing of the whole assembly ; merely some pretty-turned compliments on the taste and imagination of the fair contriver, but quite enough to convince me that the wisdom of man can be flattered by the elegant follies of the woman whom he happens to call his wife. Something was said of how proud Mr. Dunstan must be of such talents. I marked it, my dear, because — if you will pardon me — I have thought that you have been a little careless that way — only *careless* — mind the word, for you can, if you will, outshine Lady Charlotte in this respect, as well as in every other. But in all *the things* that you have given since you were married, you have never seemed to interest yourself ; provided you had your friends about you, and you had dancing enough, all went well. All was very

proper, all was done by rule — all very well — perfectly well — critically well — but nothing creative, nothing that bespoke the master-hand which you might have put forth if you would have given yourself the trouble, and which you really must take, for you *shall* give a ball.”

“ I fear I have none of those talents upon which you compliment me,” said Isabella, “ for really I did not discover that there was anything wanting in the ball and party that Mr. Willoughby so kindly spared no expence in giving, to make as many others as he could, as he flatteringly said, share in the happiness that he felt. I am sure I was very happy ; and I thought that everybody else was so also.”

“ Oh ! certainly,” replied Mrs. Nesbitt, “ there was nothing wanting to *others*, but I was afraid that so far it was a cost manque, as it did not seem to

have reflected any honour upon you. Whole columns were filled with a description of the marvels of Lady Charlotte's feast, of the charms of the fair enchantress, of her wit and her talents. One should have thought that she was the only person in the room worth looking at, and there might have been no Mr. Dunstan in the world. But *you* were dismissed with, 'On Monday evening Mr. Willoughby gave a splendid entertainment to his numerous friends, and other distinguished fashionables, at his house in Grosvenor-street, in honour of his nuptials.' Not a word of you, my dear! Nothing said of *your* beauty, of *your* taste! Not a word as if you had had any share in the business. *Mr.* Willoughby's entertainment, not *Mrs.* Willoughby's: it might as well have been the celebration of your funeral as your marriage."

“ Not *quite as well* ;” said Isabella, smiling, “ I remember reading the paragraph, and being pleased that the only circumstance was noticed that could reflect honour upon me.”

“ Oh, you would not have thought so,” said Mrs. Nesbitt, “ if you had heard what Mr. Willoughby said to Lady Charlotte, as they stood shaded from the general eye by the crimson and gold drapery. And I am sure you will not think so when I tell you that this ball, which you hold so lightly, is to be the first step in the plan that I have formed for your reforming your husband.”

“ Reforming my husband !” exclaimed Isabella, “ Good God, madam ! does Mr. Willoughby want reforming ?”

“ Yes, my dear,” returned Mrs. Nesbitt, coolly, “ and so do all other men who have lived unmarried till two or three and thirty — now don’t agitate

yourself—don't suppose that I am going to charge Mr. Willoughby 'with treasons, stratagems, and spoils.' He is the last man in the world that would betray any body, though he may be betrayed.—And as for spoils, poor Willoughby!—he is more likely to furnish, than to gain them; but, my dear, 'the full soul loatheth the honey comb,' as the wise man says; and there are certain habits that a lengthened celibacy gives men, and certain notions not very favourable to our sex that it generates, which it is for the wife's good to have broken and rooted out. It is a sublime idea, that a beautiful young creature, scarcely eighteen, should be able to work such a reform—a labour of love we may call it; but it cannot be done by a *coup de main*.—French again! I declare.—We must proceed by sapping.

“ I have heard Mrs. Obrian talk of

such sublimities," said Isabella, with something of indignation in her tone, "but I never could understand her: it always appeared to me that the end could have been better attained by going directly to the proposed point."

"Oh, indeed, you are mistaken, my dear," returned Mrs. Nesbitt. "We must, as the Bible says, sometimes 'fetch a compass,'—a little circumlocution. There!—I have escaped both *detour* and roundabouts this time. I always say that the English language has as many words as the French, though I cannot always think of the right word just when I want it."

Isabella, depressed by Mrs. Nesbitt's observations, and wearied with her loquacity, sat pensively silent, wholly uninterested in the comparative richness of the French and English language, and puzzled between the sanctity of the end that she had in view,

and the unworthiness of the means, as it seemed to her, that was proposed for the accomplishment of it.

“What! ‘Sweeting, all *a mort*?’” said the eternally quoting Mrs. Nesbitt. “These grave looks will never stand against the eternal *enjoüement* of Lady Charlotte.—Now promise me, you must absolutely promise me, that you will give this ball, and then, as we proceed, I will open my whole plan to you.”

“I will promise you,” said Isabella, “that I will ask Mr. Willoughby to give me leave to give it.”

“Now, my dear, this is a tone that will never do,” said Mrs. Nesbitt; you have a good foundation in that pretty notion of subserviency to your lord and master, and I know that submission to a husband is a duty.—God forbid that I should say otherwise; and I am sure I always practised it, hard

as I have sometimes found it ; but as for those supererogatory works, of never acting without his concurrence, and of rather suffering offence than giving it, they are all, as the apostle speaks, ‘ but straw and stubble ;’ rubbishy notions fit only to be burnt. What would have become of that surly brute Nabal,—Nabal was his name, and folly was with him ; ‘ that man of Belial,’ as the discreet Abigail calls him, if the ‘ woman of the beautiful countenance and good understanding,’ had thought it necessary to have asked his consent, before she had taken the loaves, and the sheep, and the wine, and the raisins and figs, and the corn with which she loaded so many asses, that she gave to the hungry David, and by appeasing his hunger, and his anger, saved the life of her churlish husband?—I am sure that was a sublime act, if ever there was one—why

are such things recorded, but for examples, my dear?—You are of a beautiful countenance, you are of a good understanding, my dear child, and why should you not act as seems good in your eyes, for the good of your husband?”

“Because, my dear Madam,” said Isabella, “Mr. Willoughby is no Nabal,—he can act for himself; and I can have all I wish, and more than I wish, for simply asking for it; and I have no scruple but that I shall not encroach upon so much indulgence.”

“Very true, my dear, very true;” said Mrs. Nesbitt. “Willoughby has ‘a hand open as day to melting charity;’ so ask and have—ask and have.”

CHAP. IX.

“ Yet he is soft of voice and aspect ;
Indifferent, not austere.”

BYRON.

THE conference with Mrs. Nesbitt had lasted much longer, and had taken a much more serious and consequential turn, than Isabella had anticipated. It had entirely disinclined her from prosecuting any other of her intended morning avocations. She returned home immediately, her head and her heart full of new thoughts and feelings, which she did not understand, and

which she feared to analyze. The simple sorrow of being rivalled in the admiration of her husband, and which she had been doubtful whether she might not owe rather to her own imperfections, than his fault, was swelled to an apprehensive fear lest this husband, whom she had been taught to consider as perfect, and whom her imagination idolized, was not regarded in the world as tainted by its errors, and duped by its follies ;—what was this reform which she was to work in Mr. Willoughby? How was she to effect it? and how strange that she should hear only of its necessity from one who had been the warmest eulogist, the most enthusiastic admirer of his virtues and his talents, at a time when a little prudent doubt, and a little rational discrimination, might have been as guides to her conduct, or as preservatives from disappointment.—Isabella wished

that she could hear more.—Isabella wished that she had not heard so much. —Mrs. Nesbitt could *mean* nothing but what was kind, but she might be mistaken. Yet she was *not* mistaken in one point ; it was too evident, that if Isabella were to possess her husband's heart, she must conquer it.—How to complete this conquest became her most serious consideration. Mrs. Nesbitt asserted, that it could not be done by the beaten road of obedience, forbearance, passiveness. She must make herself *felt*, that she might be beloved ; she must shew that she might be lost, that her value might be known. —Isabella was not unaware of the slippery ground that she was urged to tread. One false step, and she was undone!—Yet she a little wished to try the experiment ; she more than a little wished to triumph over Lady

Charlotte, and she resolved to follow the advice of Mrs. Nesbitt.

I have rights, thought she, I have affections. Alas! I even love!—what can Lady Charlotte oppose to such claims? Is she indeed so pre-eminently charming that all must sink on the comparison? what is Lady Charlotte that I cannot be? and what would I not be to excel her in the eyes of Mr. Willoughby?

While Isabella was lost in thoughts such as these, and in a variety of plans conceived and rejected in the same moment, how she could best effect her purpose, Mr. Willoughby entered the room—a consciousness of error tinged her cheek with crimson, and gave a little flutter to her manner of receiving him.

“You look as if you were thinking of your lover,” said Mr. Willoughby laughing.

“ I *was*, ” returned Isabella, playfully.

“ And what was your thought ? ” said Mr. Willoughby.

“ I thought that I would make him a request, ” said Isabella.

“ Name it, and take it, ” returned Mr. Willoughby, in gay good humour.

“ I should like to give a ball, ” said Isabella.

“ A ball ? ” — said Mr. Willoughby, with a tone of some surprise, — “ I was not aware that your talents lay that way, my dear. ”

“ Does it require much talent to give a ball ? ” asked Isabella.

“ To give it with *effect* it does — and without it is done in a way that is distinguished, one had better save one’s money, and one’s trouble, and amuse oneself at the expense of other people. ”

“ You would rather then that I

thought no more about the matter?" said Isabella, with a feeling that she had been repulsed.

"Oh, by no means," returned Mr. Willoughby, — "if giving a ball will give you the least pleasure, I am sure that *I* shall wish for no other effect. I had only conceived from the indifference which you shewed as to taking any management in the little that we have done of this sort, that you had no taste for such things; and although I admire the talents that can give novelty and grace to so common an occurrence as a ball, yet I acknowledge that they are wholly feminine — I have neither imagination nor activity for such a performance; but I shall rejoice to find that you have." —

"If I am at a loss," returned Isabella, "you know I can call in a powerful coadjutrix."

“Lady Charlotte?”—said Mr. Willoughby with quickness.

The lucid fairness of Isabella’s complexion became instantly suffused with the colour of the rose.”

“I thought of mamma,” said she—and they were both silent for a minute.

“You could not have a better,”—said Mr. Willoughby, recovering himself—“and when shall this great gala be? now you have named it, I feel quite an inclination for the thing.”

Isabella had lost hers; but she could not now draw back, and the mighty *when* was soon settled—but if to fix the *when* did not require much consultation, this was by no means the case with the *how*. —

Mrs. Nesbit was no sooner acquainted that the bill had received the assent of the sovereign, than the whole of her little soul was in a bustle; her brain became a chaos of contrivances,

— there was not a room or a closet in Mr. Willoughby's house that did not, in her imagination, undergo an entire change ; partitions were removed and erected ; boudoirs were transformed into temples ; and dressing rooms into conservatories, while columns and arches arose on every hand with a facility that would have done honour to Aladdin's lamp. Every angle was to her mind's eye shaded with the most beautiful drapery ; every recess hung with the most magnificent canopies : there were also to be so many ingenious surprises : so many witty secrets, which were to come to light so *a propos* ! that Isabella was alike bewildered by such a labyrinth of metamorphoses, and sickened by so much deception. Nor was she much relieved by the more solemn and profound erudition with which the matter was treated by Lady Jane, to whom she had

recourse a little to stem the tide of Mrs. Nesbitt's destructive, or as she called them, creative powers. Lady Jane, as much a pedant in the arranging an entertainment as in educating a daughter, overlooked the solid foundation of "simplicity" in the one, as she did of "religious obligation" in the other, and gave all her attention to details that could have no value but in the eyes of the upholsterer, or the passing moral of the day. The shade of a drapery, or the affixing of a chandelier, cost her as much consideration, and brought forth as deep a train of reasoning, as might have been sufficient to have settled the various interests at the Congress of Vienna. The Misses Hastings also added to the perplexity of poor Isabella; they had each their favourite plan, which, however, varied with every successive hour, and the continual intreaty of "Do,

dear Isabella, let it be so," — " Now pray, Isabella, indulge me," — and the violent condemnation, or praise of their several fancies, — " Oh, that would be hideous, shocking!" — " Oh, that would be delightful, delicious, exquisite!" — " quite new!" — " common place!" *et cetera, et cetera*, so exhausted the spirits and so puzzled Isabella's desire to oblige each, that she knew not what to decide; and acknowledging that she *had* no talents for the decorations of a ball, she would most willingly have resigned the whole management into the hands of Lady Jane and Mrs. Nesbitt, had not the latter continually reminded her, that it was not only " the giving a ball," in which she was engaged, but a trial of skill with her rival; and that it would not avail how "*nouvelle*," or "*unique*," the entertainment was, if Mr. Willoughby were

not made sensible that it was the offspring of her genius.—

Under this spur, Isabella laboured on to accomplish that which her real good taste and good sense told her could be of no use whatever to the interests of her heart. Experience confirmed the dictates of these two infallible guides; for she soon found, that although Mr. Willoughby bore with unwearied good temper the eternal discussions, the accumulated notes and callings that this business produced from Mrs. Nesbitt and Lady Jane; and that he even seemed to have pleasure in all from which she appeared to derive any, yet that in fact he took no more interest in the details in which she was hourly engaged, than he would have done if they had regarded the furnishing of a baby-house. He smiled upon the importance that seemed to be attached

to the various alterations that were going forward, as a mother does on the delight that her infant shews in dressing a doll ; but Isabella could see no symptom how all this display of “ taste ” was advancing her one degree in his love, esteem, or admiration. She began heartily to repent of having engaged in such an enterprise ; and thought of nothing but how to get over it with the least trouble : and to forget it when it was over as soon as she could ; — but Isabella knew not yet the slippery path of emulating vanity ! — she knew not the hateful passions that are involved in the single word *rivalship*.

CHAP. X.

——“ Yet I see
Thy honourable metal may be wrought
From that it is disposed.”—

SHAKSPEARE.

THE important day at length arrived! Mrs. Nesbitt had invited herself to dine with Isabella, that she might assist in overlooking all the preparations, and in ascertaining that all was in order, and every one at their post. She also promised herself the reward of witnessing Mr. Willoughby's delighted approbation on such a display of his

wife's imaginative talents, for as Mrs. Nesbitt herself had been the master-wheel of the whole machine, she had not a doubt but that its movements would secure the most animated applause.

For these, the first fruits of this so confidently anticipated triumph, she was, however, obliged to wait longer than she had reckoned upon. Mr. Willoughby had no taste for the restricted space and scanty attendance which generally belongs to the lords and ladies of the most extended mansions upon such days of gala. He had been out the whole morning; had returned only to dress, and without having once walked through the decorated rooms, had gone out again to dinner.

“*Tant mieux! tant mieux!*” said the mortified Mrs. Nesbitt,—“I like it the better. His surprise and admiration will only be the greater when he

sees the apartments lighted up, and every thing in its highest glory. Yes, yes, his heart will die within him, like good old Jacob's, when he heard of the wealth and honours of his son. Your triumph will then be complete."

"I wish I had more spirit to enjoy it," said Isabella, "but I feel sad."

"Nothing in the world, my dear, but anxiety and fatigue," said Mrs. Nesbitt.—"We will dine, and that will refresh you; and then to the important labours of the toilette."

"Labour, fatigue, and anxiety, are but indifferent elements to form pleasure from," said Isabella.

"Oh, there is no *rose sans picque*," replied Mrs. Nesbitt. "Joseph you know, my dear, was taken from a dungeon to be governor of Egypt."

"I wonder," said Isabella, smiling, "how you happen to be so well read

in Scripture, as to be able to quote its authority on every occasion."

"*No wonder* at all, my dear!" returned Mrs. Nesbitt. "I was brought up by an old grandmother, and was forced to learn chapter after chapter by rote, on pain of her displeasure, which was by no means a non-entity, I can assure you, and thus it is all in my *head*."

"And never reached your heart," said Isabella, laughing, "but will any of your Scripture learning assist Adams to decide between the dresses that have been sent home for me to choose from? for I have really been so worried for the last week between "*bleu celeste*" and "*bleu foncée*," between the "elegant" and the "superb," that I have not a clear idea left upon the subject, and Adams is quite in despair at my stupidity."

"Oh," said Mrs. Nesbitt, "I de-

clare for the superb, without any hesitation upon this occasion; and, indeed, I think I could give some authority for it. You remember how gorgeously Judith and Esther arrayed themselves when their purpose was to catch the hearts of those they feared;—but I cannot say that all my grandmother's gettings off helped me forward much in the article of dress. We read, indeed, of a party-coloured garment, but that is now become the appropriate mark of a fool; and also a great deal about needle-work and embroidery, but not a word to enable one how to apply them to the modern modes; so, my dear, we must think more of Madame Lambert in these matters, than of the Bible. And now let us go to your dressing-room, and decide between the “*bleu celeste*” and the “*bleu foncée*.”

In this decision Isabella took little

part, and Mrs. Nesbitt and Adams carried all before them, and Isabella descended from her toilette, to use Mrs. Nesbitt's expression, "*extrêmement parée.*"

She descended also with a heavy heart; although not able to tax Mr. Willoughby with actual unkindness in so long delaying his return from his dinner party, she felt a consciousness of being neglected, and while she suggested a thousand excuses for the negligence, she felt her eyes fill with tears, and her heart tremble with apprehension. Mrs. Nesbitt saw nothing of all this, so wholly was she engrossed with admiring her own performances, and in anticipating the wonderful effects that they were to produce on the wandering affections of a fickle husband.

The apartments now began to fill, but Isabella was scarcely conscious that

she was not alone — with her eyes fixed upon the entrance, she thought only of Mr. Willoughby, and not seeing him, she saw nobody. When her attention for a few moments had been forcibly diverted from this only point of interest, on recovering the power of renewing it, she cast an eager glance on the accumulating crowds, to discover if, among the multitude, she could discern that single countenance which she so longed to see. Her feverish impatience magnified minutes into hours, and to her it seemed as if half the evening was gone, and she had nearly consigned herself to despair, when at length Mr. Willoughby appeared.

He came, and he came with Lady Charlotte ! his dinner engagement had been with Mr. Dunstan, and the groupe that now entered was composed of the company who had been guests at his table. Never did Lady Charlotte look

more commandingly beautiful ; and as if she had disdained to owe any of her attractions to external ornament, she was this evening, contrary to her usual custom, dressed with a marked simplicity — a simplicity, which, if it were unsuited to the splendour of the gala where she was to make her appearance, rendered her the most distinguished figure there, and formed a striking contrast to the display and magnificence of Isabella's dress. Isabella's heart smote her ! how willingly would she have deposited her jewels in their boxes, and have exchanged her gorgeous robe for the simplest garment ever worn by village maiden !

How vain ! how ostentatious will Willoughby think me — this odious ball has occasioned me nothing but mortification ! — were the painful thoughts that passed through her mind as the gay and happy party led by

Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby approached her.

“My dear Isabella,” said Mr. Willoughby, “you must have thought me a sad truant.”

“But it is *I* whom you must put into the corner,” said Lady Charlotte, gaily; “it is all my fault. I protest I do not know how the hours flew; but my good friends here were *all* so agreeable that I had no notion that it was so late — it was quite abominable not to remind me; and now I recollect, this naughty Willoughby was worse than any body, for he would have another song, another air, till I am half dead with squalling.”

The covert impertinence of this pretended apology was of use to Isabella; instead of humbling her, it gave her spirit to reply.

“You do yourself injustice; it is not so late as you seem to imagine;

dancing has not commenced, though some of the young ladies, I believe, begin to be impatient."

"Shew us then the way to the ball-room," said Mr. Willoughby; for I protest I don't know where I am, though in my own house."

"Oh that is quite delightful!" cried Mrs. Nesbitt, who, coming up at the instant, caught the last words. "I always told Mrs. Willoughby that it would be so; but we have a great many more charming surprises and puzzles for you; so come along, and be enchanted at every step."

"If you mean bewildered by being enchanted," returned Mr. Willoughby, "you are right. Isabella, are we to turn to the right or the left? This is all quite different from what it used to be."

"To be sure!" said Mrs. Nesbitt, with a tone of triumph. "Now you

see the difference between a ball given by a gentleman and a lady."

Isabella heard the word "vulgar!" uttered in a whisper by Lady Charlotte to Mr. Willoughby, who laughed.

"Come, my lady ball-giver," said he to Isabella, "lead the way."

It is not the way to my triumph, thought she, but to my humiliation; and I deserve it.

Yet on their entrance into the ball-room an involuntary exclamation of delight which burst from Lady Charlotte's lips gave her a momentary exaltation.

Perhaps all my folly will not be thrown away! thought Isabella.

The dancing immediately began; but Lady Charlotte declined taking any share in it, and Mr. Willoughby remaining near her, they continued in conversation till the first pause in that pleasurable exercise gave

them an opportunity of again seeking Isabella.

“If you are not going to dance again directly,” said Mr. Willoughby to her, “pray come with Lady Charlotte and me, and let us make the tour of the rooms. I really must understand all that you have been doing, and Lady Charlotte is an adept in this art, and longs to criticise.”

“Don’t believe a word he says, my dear Isabella,” said Lady Charlotte: “I long for no such thing; I only want to admire, and to teach him to admire.”

“I can scarcely expect either one or the other,” returned Isabella, “from your science, or Mr. Willoughby’s indifference; but I am ready to attend you.”

“Oh! you are quite mistaken as to Mr. Willoughby’s indifference about such matters,” said Lady Charlotte;

“ he is nothing so little as indifferent ; though he may, in his masculine superiority, pretend to despise such frivolities ; but we will make him take both pride and pleasure in your fairy works before the night is over, or we will know the reason why.”

“ The reason is very simple,” replied Mr. Willoughby : “ if I have neither pride nor pleasure in such things, it is because I do not understand them. The brightest ornament of a ball-room is a number of happy faces, and the power of producing them worth all the draperies and paper temples that ever Nixon furnished ;” and so saying, he drew Isabella’s arm under one of his, and offering the other to Lady Charlotte, who immediately took it, the trio moved on together, notwithstanding the uplifted hands and eyes of Mrs. Nesbitt, and the manifest to-

kens that she made to Isabella of the total disapproval of such a procedure.

To the eye of a reasoner of Mrs. Nesbitt's sort, nothing could indeed be less likely to promote the triumph of Isabella over her rival than their being thus placed in immediate comparison, — Lady Charlotte's eye beaming with triumphant malice and projected mischief; Isabella, meek and mortified, disgusted by the familiarity affected by Lady Charlotte in her address and manners towards her husband, and ashamed to be led in triumph, as it were, by the very person over whom she hoped to have triumphed; while Mr. Willoughby, equally unconscious of the feelings of either of his companions, and far from sharing in the one or the other, thought not of any thing beyond enjoying the present moment. Of intended injury or unkindness to Isabella he was wholly in-

nocent ; and had the supposition been suggested to him, would have declared himself incapable of any such enormity. Nor was he more aware of the arts by which Lady Charlotte was appropriating him to herself, nor of the web of flattery which she was weaving around him. Yet she had already established an intimacy between them, of which, if he had been asked the grounds, he could not have found them. She could now talk to him of “ old times ;” could reproach him laughingly for “ having once betrayed her into a fool’s paradise ;” could remark that “ he had known to choose better ;” could sigh, look down, and blush, — and yet could so quickly resume her gaiety, or could put on so natural a carelessness, as to leave him in doubt whether he had escaped from a coquet, or had sacrificed the genuine passion of a beautiful creature

to too rigid an attention to the dictates of prudence. Of any danger to his happiness, or his loyalty to Isabella, he did not dream; for had he not chosen her, and rejected Lady Charlotte? He went on, therefore, amusing himself, without a purpose or a fear of injury to others or himself; and least of all to his innocent and amiable wife.

Nothing could exceed the gaiety and enjoyment of Lady Charlotte at this moment — unshackled by any delicacy of feeling herself, or by respect to that of others, in the prosecution of her design to attract Mr. Willoughby, and to confound Isabella, she scrupled not to advance to the very confines of propriety, and beyond all the bounds of good nature. Hence she indulged in a freedom and severity of remark, which, if it raised the blush of modesty or indignation on the cheek of Isa-

bella, made Mr. Willoughby laugh, and which, in spite of his better taste and excellent temper, entertained him so extremely, that he seemed to have no ear but for her. When a momentary gravity, or a peculiar cast of countenance, announced to her quick apprehension that she was pushing her game too far, she knew how with grace and adroitness to resume her moral position, and to leave no other impression on his mind, than that youth, spirits, and happiness, are not always discreet.

But how intolerable was the situation of Isabella ! — disregarded by her husband ; angry and abashed, she maintained a grave and dejected silence, disdaining to take any part in a mirth that she felt to be unbecoming in itself, and insulting to her. The arrangement of the rooms seemed little to interest either Mr. Willoughby or Lady Charlotte. Isabella had neither

admiration to be thankful for, nor criticism to repel, and the purpose for which she had been dragged, like a captive at the wheels of the victor's chariot, was scarcely adverted to, until, as they returned to the ball-room, Lady Charlotte said, in a tone of mockery—
“All very well, excellently well, my little cousin, all quite as it should be, except that grave face of yours, which does any thing but realize Willoughby's criterion of the brightest ornament of a ball-room, and which invites your friends to any thing but mirth.”

This remark completed Isabella's discomfiture, and, hastily withdrawing her arm from under Mr. Willoughby's, she left her rival in possession of the field, and mingled with the crowd to conceal, if possible, her own defeat. But it was not here that she was to be made sensible of it — the contrasted beauties of the two cousins, the marked

difference of choice which had that evening appeared in their dress, and still more the but too apparent contest in which they were engaged, had fixed the attention of almost the whole of the congregated multitude exclusively upon them. Scarcely an individual of which it was composed, but had declared in favour of one or the other, and Isabella had, by a very large majority, the greater number of suffrages — the rights of wifehood spoke to the moral sense — her style of beauty went directly to the heart. Magnificently arrayed, and surrounded by the most dazzling splendour, her pensive air, and almost *supplicating* eye, told of the insignificance of such distinctions for the purposes of happiness, and made envy give way to pity; — while on the part of Lady Charlotte, the very *force* of her charms was against her; — the audacity of her pre-

tensions was still more so ; and the natural desire to humble the proud, and to exalt the lowly, produced an almost universal, though uncommunicated purpose, to uphold Isabella.

In an instant she found herself surrounded by numerous claimants for her hand in the dance, by a company of well-reputationed matrons, emulous to testify, by the attention to the wife, their disapprobation of the husband ; and by crowds of good-natured young ladies, who held flirtation in a *married woman*, as one of the seven deadly sins, and “that odious Lady Charlotte”—and “poor dear sweet Mrs. Willoughby”—passed from one pair of ruby lips to another, until it might have been thought that their generous souls had only been alive to the detestation of the one and compassion for the other. Happily for the amusement of the night, this was not the

exact state of the case; the words were scarcely uttered, when the tender-hearted utterers were as busily occupied in advancing each their own particular interest or pleasure, as if there had not been a Lady Charlotte or a Mrs. Willoughby in the world. Isabella, however, felt the encouragement which the interest generally manifested for her was so well calculated to give, and again remembering the standard maxim of Lady Jane not “to be wanting to herself,” she overcame, as well as she could, the feeling of mortification and inferiority which Lady Charlotte had so well succeeded in producing, and resolved to give herself up to the only pleasure that she could now promise herself from an entertainment so studiously prepared, and from which she had been taught to expect such important effects.

Isabella could not but see the admi-

ration which she excited: Mrs. Nesbitt's words recurred to her remembrance, "let him see that others can fall in love with you, and he will fall in love with you too." There may be more good sense in this advice, thought Isabella, than I was at first inclined to allow; — the form upon which many eyes are fixed, may, in the end, not be thought unworthy of even Willoughby's preference. Married almost before I was seen, he does not know the competition that he might have had to contend with, had I been a little longer in the world before he asked me of my mother. Lady Charlotte, at least, shall not again triumph over my grave looks. Willoughby shall see *one* happy face, and see it perhaps where he least expects it; nor shall Lady Charlotte have reason to think that I fear her.

Actuated by this dangerous mode of reasoning, she resolved to affect the

gaiety that she did not feel ; but finding her spirits rise with the adulation which was poured upon her from all sides, she became in reality the most joyous of the joyous group.

Dancing was Isabella's favourite amusement ; it was also the art in which she excelled most of her companions, and particularly so Lady Charlotte. Stimulated by the desire of displaying her superiority, and animated by flattery, Isabella this evening excelled herself ; the murmur of applause reached the ears of Mr. Willoughby, where he still sat by the side of Lady Charlotte — he stepped forward to observe her — the dance had ceased, but Isabella was engaged in a lively conversation with her partner.

“ How beautiful Isabella looks to night ! ” said Mr. Willoughby, looking on her with a pleased surprise, as she raised her beautiful eyes with a look of

gay intelligence to Sir Charles Seymour.

“I always told you she was handsome, said Lady Charlotte—*very* handsome — handsomer than I am a great deal, but you never looked as if you believed me.”

“I never saw her so animated! — so all soul! before,” said Mr. Willoughby.

“Oh how should you?” returned Lady Charlotte. “I doubt, my good friend, if Mr. Dunstan would see either animation or soul in my eyes — the conversation of a husband has no Promethean powers!”

Mr. Willoughby’s vanity was wounded. I am not a Dunstan, thought he.

“I do not believe,” returned he, very seriously, “that Sir Charles has any such powers for Isabella; her animation is as innocent as it is engaging.”

“Bless me! who ever thought other-

ways?" said Lady Charlotte, carelessly; "and I beg that you will think my animation innocent, too, although not excited by my husband."

"I must answer you in your own words," replied Mr. Willoughby, with a smile of a very equivocal nature, "who ever thought otherways?" but come, do not let you and me quarrel — rather let us dance.

A flash of indignation darted from the eyes of Lady Charlotte; it was but momentary, and was instantly succeeded by the most fascinating smile.

"You know," said she, "it is not my forte to say No!"—and she suffered him to lead her into the dance, although by no means unconscious that dancing was far less her forte, than the power of denial. Mr. Willoughby gently pressed the hand, so flatteringly yielded, and then took credit to himself for the little rebuff that he had

given Lady Charlotte, and the warmth with which he had defended Isabella.

How happy would the knowledge of this defence have made her!—and still more perhaps would she have been delighted with the praises which he had bestowed upon her person — of her innocence it could never have occurred to her, that he could entertain a doubt; but of his appreciation of her beauty she had now the most mortifying mistrust.

It was not, however, from the admiration of her husband that Isabella was this evening to derive her gratification — she saw him indeed, for the remainder of its festive hours, take a full share in the general amusement; but still Lady Charlotte appeared to be the point of attraction from which he could not withdraw himself; and she turned away her eyes, and removed from their vicinity, that she might not see what robbed her

of all self-possession, and hazarded the betrayal of the inmost recesses of her heart. It was therefore in listening to the flattery of Sir Charles Seymour, that she endeavoured to lose the consciousness of the homage that she believed Mr. Willoughby to be offering to Lady Charlotte, and it was in allowing herself to take pleasure in the incense that was offered to her vanity, that she strove to forget the wounds that were inflicted upon her heart.

But the excitation was too powerful, the effort too great ; — she became feverish and exhausted, and before the splendid apartments had closed upon the last of the numerous guests, Isabella, over-worn, and tortured by a violent head-ache, had retired to her own room.

CHAP. XI.

—— “ Judge not what is best
By pleasant, though to Nature seeming meet ;
Created as thou art to nobler end.”

MILTON.

ISABELLA awoke to no pleasureable recollections. Languid in body and mind, the occurrences of the past evening furnished nothing to cheer either one or the other. This, supposed so important ball, had not established one point of mutual interest between herself and Mr. Willoughby ; had occasioned no communication ; had collected no store of

confidential remark or gay observation, from which to draw for after amusement or friendly intercourse. The evening *had been*, and *was gone* — and she could not flatter herself that the display of her taste, and her talents for decoration, had advanced her one step in the estimation of her husband, or that he would not as soon forget *her* ball, as she had invariably seen him do the balls of other people. Before she awoke, he was already gone out to his usual morning engagements; and when she left her room, it was only to look on the deserted and disordered apartments, from whence was already removing the tattered and faded ornaments which had cost such enormous sums to arrange and to affix. Isabella turned from the scene with disgust; but it was only to fix the disgust upon herself.

How was it possible, thought she,

that I could suffer Mrs. Nesbitt to persuade me to such a folly? How could I for a moment believe that such an act of vanity and extravagance could make me more amiable in the eyes of my husband? When *he* prepared the feast, I was happy: now I have made it a piece of management, to entrap, as it were, his admiration, I am disappointed and mortified. There must be some error in her reasoning. Her plan may do with some men, but it will never succeed with Mr. Willoughby; he has been too well used to all that adorns life to give much credit to the talents that produce such common effects. They may furnish him with a theme for flattery to the happy woman whom he admires, but cannot recommend a wife to his affection. Alas! what can? How kind and how fond he has been! and how indulgent does he continue to be! Ought I not to

be satisfied? Mamma, I know, would scold me if I were to complain. How often has she told me that a husband's love would not outlive the honeymoon; but that, if I were discreet, I might always secure my husband as my best friend. I have read such things, too, in some French moralists; but if the husband's love is so evanescent, how comes it that the wife feels so differently? Oh! no: I cannot believe it. There *are* charms, there *are* qualities, that can secure the heart of a husband for life. Were I more attractive, were I more like Lady Charlotte, Mr. Willoughby would love me now exactly as he did during those happy, happy weeks that we passed in Hertfordshire. The fault must be in me, not in him; for still he is very kind. He would have me happy, but he cares not that I should be only happy through him; and that must be be-

cause he can be happy otherwise than by me.

The sadness of these reflections made Isabella forget that her breakfast was untasted before her. It had remained untouched to a very late hour, when Mrs. Nesbitt ran into the room to her.

“My dearest creature, I have been in despair! I thought I never should get to you. I thought that you must have been gone out these fifty hours ago. What a little philosopher you are, to be able to sit solitarily at home, when you could not have shown yourself any where without having been crowned with laurels. Such a sensation! Never did a ball answer so well.”

“Answer!” repeated Isabella: “My dear Mrs. Nesbitt, in what respect did it answer? Could any thing be more declared than Mr. Willoughby’s ex-

clusive admiration of Lady Charlotte? Could any thing be more evident than that he did not care a pin for all the ingenious contrivances and expensive decorations you suggested, and which you so kindly wished to give me the credit of?"

"What have you been dreaming of, my dear Mrs. Willoughby?" said Mrs. Nesbitt, "and what have you been thinking of since you awoke, to take things *à travers* thus, to make you look so sad? And I verily believe that you have not yet breakfasted! No wonder that your heart faints within you. After all the delightful excitations of last night, it is of course that you should feel exhausted; but then, my dear, you should take some means to recruit yourself. Let me give you a cup of coffee. Bless me, it is cold! May I ring the bell? Pray, Sir, bring Mrs. Willoughby some hot

coffee. As you drink it, my dear, I will tell you such things!—things that will be more restorative than all the coffee in the world.”

“I wish you could tell me,” said Isabella, “that I had not played the fool.”

“Played the fool, indeed!” returned Mrs. Nesbitt; “yes, as David did, and saved his life by it. Now I call that playing the wise man; and you will have been the wise woman too, and I trust will continue so. Nothing more marked than Mr. Willoughby’s exclusive admiration indeed! Why, my dear, they absolutely quarrelled!—true as I ’m alive!—and quarrelled about *you*!—Mr. Willoughby said you were so beautiful, and so lovely, and so all soul, and I don’t know what; and Lady Charlotte was ready to box his ears; for she will always have it that you have no spirit, and

tries to make him believe that as you only married him because mamma appointed it, so you don't care a rush for him. But it would not do last night ; — it is all quite true ; — I was told it all by one who heard the very words."

" You astonish me !" said Isabella. " Why should he say such things to Lady Charlotte, and appear to me to feel them so little ?"

" Oh ! my dear, you never will do yourself justice. How could he forbear from saying such things, when every body was saying them all around him ? And this Lady Charlotte could not bear, and so, of course, said something depreciating ; and then it was that he grew so warm, and praised you more than any body did ; and Lady Charlotte was so provoked that she looked like a fury."

" When could all this happen ?" said Isabella. " They were never sepa-

rated during the whole evening, and I left them in the room, and Mr. Willoughby went out this morning before I awoke."

"All very likely," returned Mrs. Nesbitt; "for after the fracas he made her dance; on purpose, my informer thought, to show how inferior she was to you, for she certainly dances like a cow; and you, my dear,—but I have no words to say how *you* dance; — Jephthah's daughter would have been nothing to you; — and so they continued together, sometimes squabbling, sometimes dancing: but that cruel head-ache of yours prevented you from seeing any thing of all this; and what more kind than that Mr. Willoughby should not disturb you before he went out?"

"I wonder he did not wish to know that my head-ache was better," said Isabella, with a sigh.

“ Oh ! it was sure to be better, my dear,” returned Mrs. Nesbitt ; “ all head-aches are better. Nothing more than a little heat and a little fatigue. Most heads would have done more than ached ; they would have been turned by such a buzz of admiration as you had about you last night ; and if you kept your own steady, there were many that were turned, I can tell you. I have been all round the town, my dear, just to pick up what I could learn of how things went off ; but all the glory of the rooms was lost in your glory. Never did I hear such encomiums !—such raptures !—one should have thought that you had never been seen before. But you were divinely dressed, that ’s the truth of it. You see I was quite right as to the ‘ *superbe*.’ I knew the point from whence you would be seen to advantage. Lord Thomas himself said that no-

thing was ever more lovely, — more captivating !”

“ He is the last man in the world that I should wish to speak of me .at all,” said Isabella ; “ I always shun him as if he were the plague.”

“ You will be very clever if you can shun him now,” said Mrs. Nesbitt ; “ for I warn you that he has marked you. And what harm ? The more *you* look *down* upon, the more *Mr. Willoughby* will look *up* to you.”

“ If I thought I should find Mr. Willoughby in the Park,” said Isabella, “ I would drive there directly.”

“ Oh ! drive there, by all means,” said Mrs. Nesbitt. “ I will send my carriage home ; it has been out all morning. You shall take me with you, and set me down afterwards ; and as we go I will tell you more of the effects of last night.”

Of some of these effects Isabella had

already experienced too much. It was not possible that all the arrows which Mrs. Nesbitt shot so plentifully from her *adulation bow* should all fall harmless. Isabella knew that the most flattering things which she repeated could not wholly be her own invention, for they had been too frequently addressed to her own ears. She therefore easily persuaded herself that what was reported as having passed between Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby might also be true. Perhaps then, after all, Mrs. Nesbitt might be right; the way to Mr. Willoughby's heart might be through the admiration that she should excite in others. She thought that she could judge whether this were the case or no, if she could see him while the impression that was said to be given was recent. She felt impatient to throw herself in his way, and

thought every moment lost till she was in the Park.

The first object that she saw there was Mr. Willoughby. He rode directly up to her carriage, inquired kindly after her health, and after having received a satisfactory answer, confirmed by the sparkling eye, and glowing cheeks of Isabella, he began gaily to talk to her of her achievements the evening before—told her of the conquests she had made, bade her beware that she did not get his throat cut, and after laughing and chatting by the chariot window for about three minutes, rode on, and left her to prosecute her drive.

Isabella was in Heaven! — she felt herself already in possession of all that Mrs. Nesbitt had promised her, and could not but accede to that lady's vehement asseverations that all she had foretold had come true, and that if she

would but continue to go on as she had begun, that she could not fail to beat Lady Charlotte and every other competitor from the field.

Isabella was this day engaged to dinner, where she met with a large and brilliant party, all emulous to compliment her on the pleasure that she had afforded them the evening before; and eager to stimulate her, by the most exaggerated estimation of it, to repeat the expensive gratification. Lady Charlotte was present; she appeared to be annihilated; and, added to the usual gay good humour with which Mr. Willoughby was accustomed to treat Isabella, she fancied that she saw something of an air of gallantry in his address to her, which told her that the admiration which she had excited in others had not been lost upon him.

The evening was closed by other scenes equally gratifying to her self-

love, and to the holy triumph, as she thought it, over Lady Charlotte.

Isabella returned home intoxicated with her success. She called it happiness ; she called it the gratification of conjugal love. Alas ! she knew not that it was composed of vanity, of pride, of strife, of envy, and of hate !

Poor human nature ! to what dangers art thou exposed, even in thy pursuits after the most worthy objects !

CHAP. XII.

“Ranks as a virtue, and is still a vice.”

COWPER.

THE present effervescence of Isabella's mind stirred up the latent love of pleasure which nature had implanted, and which education had nourished; but which, in the first days of her marriage, had been smothered by the more exquisite delight which she derived from being the sole and exclusive object of Mr. Willoughby's thoughts and affections, and which,

on her return to more general society, had been depressed by the fear that she had lost, or was losing, this, *to her* the first distinction of life. But now, when she could persuade herself to regard it as the means of securing the inestimable prize of a husband's love, it awoke with fresh vigour, and was but the more predominant for its late subjection. If education had left one impression deeper than another upon the mind of Isabella, it was, that amusement was the great business of life. It is true that it had been qualified by the undefined, and perhaps undefinable epithet, "innocent." But pleasure, in some form, had been held out to her as the sum of all human happiness. It had been the bribe that had made smooth the first rudiments of knowledge; it had been the reward of her progress in all that she had been taught; it was to be her indem-

nification, in the days of wifehood, for the restraint of those of the nursery and the school-room. She was to be happy by something external, and independant on herself. To be amused, was to be the philosopher's stone, that would transmute all things into gold; to be dull, was to be reduced to *nothing*.

Having now the means in her power, and stimulated by the desire of showing herself wherever Lady Charlotte was to be seen, Isabella, "nothing loth," threw herself into the vortex of dissipation; and, from having been retiring and pensive, under a sense of her husband's indifference, became, from the overpowering desire to gain his affections, the gayest of the gay, and the most prominent figure in pleasure's festive train.

Mrs. Nesbitt, continually at her elbow, failed not to urge her forward in

the unholy career into which she had entered. The spur was always the same: there was some superiority to be gained over Lady Charlotte; or there was some flagrant attempt to seduce Mr. Willoughby from his rightful allegiance to be punished. It was a perpetual struggle; a continual hostility; and Isabella's gentler soul would have withdrawn from the contest, had not Mrs. Nesbitt been careful to cover some of its thorns, by the constant repetition of the effects that Isabella's growing popularity were working on the mind of Mr. Willoughby. As Isabella was rather told of these effects than aware of them herself, even this motive could not long have induced her to continue the course of life that she was in, but for a bosom enemy: an enemy which Isabella had no suspicion that she harboured in her breast. She had been

so often told that she was not vain, that she did not believe that she could be influenced by aught of all that creates vanity in others. She imagined that if she did not dislike to hear the praises of her charms from the mouth of the flatterers by whom she was surrounded, that it was rather from the proof that such praises afforded that she was worthy the love of Mr. Willoughby, than from any pleasure she took in the adulation itself.

And could the homage of the many have compensated for the neglect of one, Isabella had been undone.

She had stepped from the school-room into the world ; and she appeared there, not only with all the glowing charms of youth and novelty, but under the attractive form of a wife.

Isabella Hastings might have fixed the distant gaze, or might have allured, perhaps, the cautious step of

some one who “was rich enough to please himself;” she might more frequently than her companions have been invited to have exhibited herself in a quadrille, or have been more frequently led from her box at the opera; but all who feared “to be taken in” would have stood aloof; and all who might have been feared, as designing “to take in,” would have been distanced by the vigilance of Lady Jane; but the *admiring Mrs. Willoughby* involved no consequence, established no claim; all might breathe their incense at a shrine where the only offering was a heart.

The panoply of matrimony, once the bulwark of its possessor, is now become the treacherous betrayer of the treasure which it seems to guard; and Isabella, who had often heard debated with anxious hope and fear, the probability whether or not she would be

established, on her "first coming out," had now reason to think that she might have had the whole world to have chosen from.

She moved not without a crowd of adulators, with whom all that she said, or did, or looked, was "fairest, virtuous, discreetest, best." She heard from every mouth that she had no fault; and she felt it, in the universal delight which she inspired. But not for all this did even her fancy wander from the preference that she gave her husband; and all who approached her were alike indifferent, except as they were distinguished by their manners, or their understanding.

In this light Sir Charles Seymour stood foremost in her favour. The suavity of the one, and the cultivation of the other, made him always an agreeable companion to Isabella. In him also there appeared more of esteem

than admiration in all the attentions that he shewed her, and Isabella rather reposed upon him as a friend, than was upon her guard against him as a lover. He was more especially of use and pleasure to her in warding off the offensive and declared gallantries of Lord Thomas Orville.

The handsome and haughty Orville was known in the annals of fashion as the most audacious and successful of lovers. His victories had been signalized by one divorce, and by the destruction of all family peace, nearly as often as he had attempted to invade it. To avoid and shun Lord Thomas Orville had been Lady Jane's injunction to Isabella, when she sent her forth into the world, unfurnished with one safeguard against the witcheries of a man who had ruined the happiness and reputation of women of dou-

ble the experience of Isabella; yet had she been amongst his victims, Lady Jane would have told herself, and she would have told her friends, that the fault belonged wholly to her who had sinned against the training of the best education and the most explicit warnings. Of the seeds of vanity, and the love of pleasure, that she had sown in her daughter's heart, did she so little apprehend the natural harvest.

Happily for Isabella, she had that within which supplied all that had been wanting on the part of Lady Jane.

Shrinking alike from his immoralities, and offended by his presumption, neither the boasted charms of his person, nor the proud humility of Lord Thomas's devotion, had any influence over Isabella. She could not even take pride in the distinction of keeping *him* at a distance, whose approach

was courted but by too many, so much did she disdain him !

With Sir Charles Seymour the whole case was different. If Sir Charles were supposed to have had his favourites, these were the tales of other times. At five-and-forty he might be supposed to repose upon his laurels ; and, as he was the man in the world of the least pretensions, he alarmed no pride, awakened no fear, and often found himself, from the false security of the objects of his attack, master of the fort, without having once aroused the suspicion of the garrison.

Isabella was never more at ease than when in the company of Sir Charles Seymour. He would talk to her of Mr. Willoughby, and his words would be all panegyric ; yet could he so place them, that the mind of Isabella received the impression that this so eulogized husband was not wholly

worthy of the wife with whom heaven had blessed him.

Sir Charles then sees, thought Isabella, the preference that is given to Lady Charlotte, and he pities me. She hated Lady Charlotte the more ; but she did not, as Sir Charles intended that she should have done, love her husband less.

Thus time past on ; until Sir Charles had almost wholly appropriated her to himself, while she remained unconscious that he had done so.

She called him her friend ; and she was every moment upon the point of opening her whole heart to him. Of Mrs. Nesbitt's crooked policy she had become heartily weary. She was convinced that it had not advanced her one step in the affections of her husband. She had also discovered that she was a very tiresome personage ; and that Lady Jane's " best woman in

the world," meant only the best good lover of all the good things that the world could give ; that, under the sanction of garbled quotations from Scripture, she affected to justify the most worldly maxims ; and that from the fountain of all love and benevolence, she would often produce authority for hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. Isabella was disgusted ; and she resolved that she should no longer be her counsellor.

But where should she apply for that guidance which she felt to be so necessary to her ? Could she be in want of a wise and kind friend who had a mother, the pattern of all mothers ? a mother to whose unremitting care and strenuous exertions she owed the very station which was so dear to her heart, and which wanted nothing of being complete felicity, but the

knowledge of how to turn all its blessings to her own account?

Isabella had asked herself this question, but the reply had not encouraged her to seek in her mother the friend that she wanted.

There was something in Lady Jane's maxims that revolted the heart of Isabella, and which told her that her complaints would be as idle wind in the ear of Lady Jane.

In marrying her daughter splendidly she appeared to believe that she had discharged the whole of the duty of a mother — she had made her rich and distinguished : she had instructed her to be prudent ; she had shewn her by calculation that she might have all that a *wise* woman could wish for without forfeiting the world's good opinion ; and she had warned her against the *bad taste*, which led to degradation. What could she do more? she had

other daughters to dispose of; and had as little leisure as she saw reason to trouble herself about the concerns of poor Isabella — she would not indeed have been able to have understood why she was not the happiest of women. To the complaint of the indifference of her husband, she would have opposed his indulgence; to supply the want of companionship at home, she would have recommended a still more sedulous cultivation of society abroad; and, as an universal panacea, she would have told her, that no woman of common understanding ever expected to have a lover in a husband, and that none but a baby would think of crying for what no one ever possessed. Isabella was too well acquainted with the manner in which her mother treated so much “romantic nonsense,” to look to her for consolation or counsel, and she would have felt nearly as reluctant

to have confessed to Lady Jane, that she was in love with Mr. Willoughby, as to have told her she was so with Lord Thomas Orville.

In addition to these personal reasons which shut up Isabella from all confidence with her mother, there were others that would have effectually prevented her from finding that sympathy and attention from Lady Jane, which she so much wanted, and without which she felt desolate in the midst of multitudes.

Lady Jane's continual activity in furthering "the business of her life," which was yet upon her hands in the marriage of her two remaining daughters, kept her in a constant bustle of plots and manœuvring — of note-writing, and arrangements: "she was hurried out of her life, but it was all for her daughters — she knew many mothers were more careless; but, for her

part, having given them the *best of educations*, she was resolved that they should not lose the fruit of it—it should not be her fault, if they were not all as well established as her dear Isabella.”

This “dear Isabella,” however, she scarcely ever saw but in a crowd ; nor had she more than a hurried minute to afford her, even when Isabella, wearied of a home which was to her nothing but a splendid solitude, sought companionship and society with her mother and her sisters. Lady Jane “*must* speak to the dress-maker ;” Lady Jane “*must* inspect the decoration for the feast in the evening ; she had an hundred orders to give ! —and the girls ! — oh indeed you must not interrupt them. Harriet is practising the song which she is to sing ; Elizabeth the quadrille that she is to dance ; they have no time to throw away ; when they are married

it will be quite a different thing—work now, play then — you have attained the goal, and must not interrupt them in the race — I am really sorry to part with you, but I am so busy, and — we shall meet at night.”

All this was no cure for the heart-ache, and Isabella's heart grew every day more and more pained.

CHAP. XIII.

————— “ The world’s a school
Of wrong ; and what proficients swarm around !
We must, or imitate, or disapprove.”

YOUNG.

MR. Willoughby was become less attentive to Isabella, than she had ever before known him to be ; less mindful as to what would amuse or gratify her ; less in her company ; and less cheerful when there. Over his natural gaiety and carelessness there seemed to have stolen a shadow of gravity, which would at times deepen

even to abstraction, — Isabella was alarmed: she knew that he lived much with Mr. Dunstan; nor could she wholly impute such a choice to the force of Lady Charlotte's attractions. It was not probable that, under the eye of her husband, she should be most disposed to display them; still less could Isabella believe that Mr. Dunstan himself could be the inducement which led Mr. Willoughby to his house; but she knew that Mr. Dunstan loved high play, and that from the most sordid motives, it was always to be found in his society; she knew also the appetite of her cousin George Stanton for this pernicious amusement, and the disgraceful advantage that he was supposed to make of it. She knew all this, and she trembled for the consequences that might ensue to the unsuspecting, open-hearted, and generous Willoughby—yet she was obliged

to devour her griefs in silence, for to whom could she reveal them? she endeavoured, therefore, to forget them, and she found it easier to do so in the society of those whose study it seemed to be to charm away her hours, than either to consign herself to retirement and solitude, or to suffer herself to be dragged about from one place of public amusement to another, where she met with no peculiar attentions, and excited no sympathy. It was therefore in the dissipation of private parties, that Isabella continued the vain attempt to find some indemnification for the want of happiness at home. —Here the ear was always soothed with flattery, and here she was perpetually stimulated to dazzle and to outshine Lady Charlotte; but having lost the hope that she could by these means regain the heart of her husband, the contest was carried on more

from the desire of mortifying her rival, than from any expectation of good to herself.

How changed at this period was the mind of Isabella!—She was yet innocent; innocent of the intention, even of the thought of ill—but she was giving the reins to every feeling which can lead the human heart to the consummation of vice! In endeavouring to excel Lady Charlotte in every frivolous distinction, and every idle expence, she had removed every restraint on her vanity. In seeking the admiration rather than the esteem of her husband, she had tasted of the pleasure that can result from admiration in general; and in the gratification which she received from such homage, she sometimes forgot the motive which led her to allow of it. Thus she gave an insight into her heart, which more encouraged the audacious hopes of those

who sought to recommend themselves to her, than all the modesty of her outward demeanour and the propriety of her manner could do towards repressing them.—She could now triumph in the mortification of her companions, and she could sicken at their success. Her temper had lost its placidity; her benevolence its generosity; there was envy, there was hatred, there was revenge in her heart; and she sanctified them all, by the simple consideration that she *ought* not to be outdone by Lady Charlotte!

But Isabella was not thus changed without many secret upbraidings of that most true of all friends, while it is allowed to speak at all,—her conscience!—She could now look back with regret on those days of control, the emancipation from which had once been her most fervent wish;—she could remember, with something like

a sensation of shame, the time when good humour was her shield against injuries, and hope her consolation under them.—She thought, with bitter tears, that she had now neither good humour, nor hope!—but she had not yet learnt, that if she had exerted her strength rather in the regulation of her own mind, than in a worse than fruitless emulation of the guilty aberrations of the rival whom she strove to out-shine, she would have retained, in the midst of every other loss, the inestimable treasure of self-esteem.—It was intolerable to her generous temperament to think for a moment that she had no right to retain it!—she drove away the thought, by erecting in her imagination a false standard of vice and virtue.

What did she do that others did not? Her understanding told her that she was wrong; but by the maxims of

the world in which she lived, she was told every hour in the day that she was right. All seemed to live for their individual interest or pleasure.—Society was little else than a warfare, where all stratagem was allowable. Each had their circle, into which no other foot must intrude but at its peril ; and all was justified, was sanctified by the undisputed aphorism, that “ We must take care of ourselves.” Isabella asked herself, what this care was ?

The care which at this moment seemed most incumbent on Isabella, was, that she should keep Lord Thomas Orville at a distance. Notwithstanding the ever ready interposition of Sir Charles Seymour, Lord Thomas was not easily repulsed—he knew she was a neglected wife, and he saw her a dissipated one. He had believed himself irresistible, and the evident coldness of Isabella towards him had picqued

his pride, and what might at first have been little more than an idle gallantry was now become with him a point of honour to accomplish. Mr. Willoughby's negligence, and the sense which Isabella betrayed that she had of it, seemed to those who composed the circle in which she moved as having broken down more than half the barriers that any woman could oppose to the cajoleries and the perseverance of such a man as Lord Thomas. She was already pitied by the good as but another victim to be sacrificed to his profligacy ; and Isabella had heard Lady Charlotte's sarcastic remark, that the laurels of her fair cousin would soon be laid at the feet of Lord Thomas. Even Mr. Willoughby had gently warned her that he should be pained to hear her name joined with his. But this had been the voice of kindness, not of suspicion. His reli-

ance on the integrity and purity of
Isabella was unshakeable as a rock!
The

“ Graceful acts,
The thousand decencies that daily flow’d
From all her words and actions.”

gave him so firm an assurance of the
soul within, that never did a thought
cross his mind that man or devil could
sully such a chastity.

Isabella felt the justice which he did
her, and blessed him for the caution
which was pointed against her inexperience,
and not her weakness. The happiest moment
which she had known for many weeks was
that in which he exercised a guardianship
that it was her fondest wish never to have
had withdrawn for a single instant. Nothing
could be more strange than that it ever
should be so withdrawn; but, left
unguarded by her natural protector,
she more than ever clung to

the friendly support and the kind interposition of Sir Charles Seymour.

Nothing could appear more disinterested, more unstudied, than his attentions towards her ; and yet, whenever they now met, they never failed to find themselves seated by each other engaged in a conversation so interesting, and exclusive, that in the midst of crowds they were alone. The subject was still upon Mr. Willoughby. From Sir Charles, Isabella could learn a thousand little circumstances that were interesting to her. By his means she could trace the progress of a day which would otherways have been a blank. Her heart was for ever on her lips ; but she had not yet let one word escape her that spoke the feeling she had of Mr. Willoughby's neglect ; nor had she heard one word from Sir Charles Seymour that could awaken a thought of his wish to supply the place of the negligent husband. Yet

nothing that passed in the mind of Isabella was unknown to Sir Charles ; and he saw enough there to encourage him to try whether he might not only be accepted as a safeguard against Lord Thomas Orville, but also to hope that he might be admitted as a consolation for the desertion of Mr. Willoughby himself.

“ Where does Willoughby hide himself ? ” said Sir Charles to Isabella as they met one evening. “ I have not seen him any where this week.”

“ It is not one of the virtues of a wife to watch the footsteps of a husband,” said Isabella, with a faint smile.

“ It might be the pleasure of some husbands to be always in company with their wives,” returned Sir Charles. “ Possession cannot dim the lustre of a diamond.”

“ But it may be the means of discovering its flaws,” said Isabella.

“ May not the imperfection be in the vision ?” rejoined Sir Charles.

“ All things are possible !” said Isabella ; and Sir Charles felt that he had made a step.

Isabella felt also that she had been guilty of an imprudence ; and the words were no sooner uttered than her heart reproached her, and, rising hastily, she quitted Sir Charles, and studiously avoided him for the rest of the evening — another imprudence, which only served to give Sir Charles a clearer view of what was passing within.

Will it be admitted as any excuse for the weakness to which she had yielded, that the soul of Isabella was at this moment fretted almost beyond endurance ?

Mr. Willoughby had left town on a casual engagement for a day, among a number of his friends who were as-

sembled on occasion of a family ceremony. He had already extended his absence to a week, and the only notice that Isabella had received of his intention had been a few words written on the first day of his expected return, to say that she must not look for him till "she saw him."

Yet it was not from any individual attraction that he had found amongst the gay party of which he had made one, that he had forgotten the rights, and overlooked the wishes of Isabella.

Long accustomed to be unaccountable to any one for the disposal of his time, and having found Isabella the most accommodating and least exacting of wives, it did not occur to him on this first separation after their marriage, that he was not as free as he had been before that period, or that he might not, without any scruple, yield to any and every inclination that the

passing events gave rise to. Each day had brought with it some temptation to prolong his absence, and there was nothing in London to which he was impatient to return.

Sufficiently mortifying to poor Isabella would have been this statement of the truth of the case; but she had still greater cause for uneasiness of heart, in the knowledge that Lady Charlotte made one of the company wherein Mr. Willoughby had been detained so much longer than he had purposed to remain. Seeing what she had so often seen, could she doubt that Lady Charlotte was the bond from which he could not break away? And it was scarcely possible that she could put any limits to her apprehensions of the consequences of so free and familiar an intercourse, through a course of festive days, when every charm would be displayed by the lady,

and where mirth and wine, and the general manners of the society, would remove so many restraints from the gentleman.

Such had been the galling reflections of Isabella through many hours of painful solitude, previous to her meeting with Sir Charles Seymour. She had determined that she would be gay, and rebut any observations on Mr. Willoughby's absence by a dissembled indifference.

She appeared pensive and out of spirits ; and when Sir Charles touched the master key of her soul, it returned tones that laid open all the secrets which she had so earnestly determined to conceal.

Alarmed by this proof how little she was equal to the support of herself in the slippery path she was treading, she resolved to seek the aids of

more experienced and firmer minds than her own; some one who could tell her where lay the wrong of which she was sensible in herself, but which she could not discover by any of the maxims that she had hitherto been taught as the only true regulators of her conduct.

CHAP. XIV.

“ Let thy pride pardon what thy nature needs,
The salutary censure of a friend.”

YOUNG.

REPEATED experience of the degree of sympathy and assistance that she should find in Harley-street, had now reduced Isabella's visits at Lady Jane's to little more than a call of a quarter of an hour, if she happened to be in that part of the town, “to see how all was going on,” or an express visit of perhaps twice that length, if her other occupations had kept her away for

more than a day or two. But, as she was supposed not to have "any thing to tell," even these longer interviews with her sisters, if she found them disengaged enough to afford her their society, were taken up rather in detailing their own hopes and fears, their solitudes on the various points of dress, and probabilities of establishment, than in adverting to the pensive air of Isabella, or in seeking a reason for the warning voice, that sometimes told them with a sigh, that "all is not gold that glitters." They beheld her equipage from the windows, they examined her dress, and only did not envy her happiness, because they hoped one day to be as happy themselves.

It was not, therefore, to Harley-street that Isabella could resort with any hope of attention to her vexations, or of counsel that would help her to endure them. But she flattered her-

self that she had still one friend who would do both.

It is true that she feared her almost as much as she loved her ; and her fears had lately kept her more apart than she ought to have held herself from one who had seemed almost to depart from her natural character to shew kindness to her. Circumstances were, however, now become urgent, and Isabella resolved to seek the wisdom of Lady Rachel Roper.

Lady Rachel was the aunt of Mr. Willoughby. She was also the friend of all with whom she had any connection ; but she was not less the terror of more than half of those who approached her.

For the weaknesses, the imperfections, even for the *natural faults* of the human creature, she had a most extended toleration. She had a hand to support, a head to rectify, and a

heart to forgive, all that could be *fairly* charged to the frailty of our fallen condition ; but for the vices and follies of *fashion*, for those who followed the multitude to do evil only because they would be in a crowd, or for those who adopted the jargon of false morality, lest they should be thought too wise or too good, she found no apology in her understanding, or mitigation of chastisement in her feelings.

Mr. Willoughby was the only son of a beloved sister ; he had appeared to inherit all her virtues and all her graces ; and Lady Rachel had prefigured him in her mind.

— “ Th’ expectancy and rose of the fair state ;
Th’ observ’d of all observers.” —

The model, and the guide in all that dignifies the man, or that distinguishes the Christian ! — his days of infancy, of boyhood, and of opening manliness

promised no less :—but the moulding hands which should have fixed the lines of this perfect form, were withdrawn at the very moment, when all its elements were struggling each for mastery ; and that which might have been the fairest work of creation, became but the discordant, though splendid fragments of a wreck !

Mr. Willoughby's parents had died, almost simultaneously at the very period when their continuance in life seemed to be the most necessary for his well being. The restraints of guardianship were felt just long enough to be galling, but for too short a time to be useful, and Mr. Willoughby, at one and twenty, had not only a pleasure but a pride in shewing that he was his own master.

In using this liberty he soon lost the purity, the simplicity, the originality of character, which an education de-

void of all trick, of all falseness of motive, of all affectation, had seemed so firmly to have impressed. He shone, perhaps, with brighter lustre than those around him, but the fire of each was kindled alike from the same censer, and it was not holy fire !

But, amidst all that Mr. Willoughby lost, he did not lose his sincerity, — his affections, — his gratitude. The kindness, the love, and the patience of Lady Rachel, from his earliest years, and through many of the first of his aberrations, were engraven on his heart. Much that had been done he wished undone ; there were mischiefs that were irreparable, but his contrition and his candour led him never to dissemble the sense that he retained of his errors ; and he could sooner have forgotten every pleasure and every duty of his life, than have failed

in the attention and respect that he owed to Lady Rachel.

He never now approached her without pain and fear, but he did not therefore cease to visit her. His first request to Isabella, after she became his wife, was, that she would accompany him to Lady Rachel.

Of Lady Rachel Isabella had heard, and could she have shrunk from complying with any wish expressed by the object of her then newly conceived passion, she would have excused herself from this visit; but where was it that she would not go with Willoughby? nor had she ever any reason to repent her compliance.

Lady Rachel, it is true, appeared to Isabella as a creature of another world, a something that she had never seen before, but her eccentricity was as pleasing as it was novel; the "Cross Old Woman," whom she had expected

to see, appeared under the form of a commanding personage, with all the beauty that *could* escape the ravages of sixty years, and with an eye that told of a spirit within that no evolution of time could ever annihilate: graceful and dignified in her manner; plain, but energetic in her language, her words were but the dictates of her understanding, or the effusions of her heart.

There was, however, a steadiness in the look of observation with which she regarded those who were introduced to her, that appalled the timid, and confused the bashful. Isabella felt it through every nerve, while Lady Rachel stood silently gazing upon her for more than a minute; and when turning to her nephew, she at length said—"You have done well! See that you are worthy of the happiness that is in your power. Let not the world mar

this precious jewel: if you *do*, a double guilt will be yours." Isabella felt as if the warning and denunciation came from heaven itself.

With a softer air, and tenderer accent, she then addressed Isabella:

"For you, my child, you must come to me very often. I no longer go into the world; I make the world come to me: and my doors will always be open to you, while I can see you without a heart-ache."

Isabella did not understand these last words; she wondered why any heart should ache for her when her own spoke of nothing but happiness.

"What can Lady Rachel mean," said she to Mr. Willoughby, when they were alone together, "by the fear of my ever giving her the heart-ache?"

"She means," said Mr. Willoughby, laughing, and caressing her, "that you may be a naughty child; that the

world may spoil you ; and she has no charity for those whom the world spoils."

" But it has not spoilt you," said Isabella fondly. Mr. Willoughby coloured, and said, " The truth is, my dear Isabella, that Lady Rachel does not think as others do ; but I suspect that she is right, and others wrong."

It was some time before Isabella's farther knowledge of Lady Rachel confirmed this opinion of Mr. Willoughby's. Lady Rachel held the maxims by which Isabella had been taught to regulate her conduct in such sovereign contempt, that Isabella was sometimes angry ; and she treated as the merest trifles so much of what Isabella had been made to consider as the weighty matters of the law, that Isabella began to doubt her wisdom. But she found such a charm in the spirit and originality of her con-

versation as nothing could counter-vail; and she solved all that appeared to her as strange, or imbecile, by teaching herself to believe, that “poor Lady Rachel” had lived so long out of the world that she did not know what was necessary to live in it.

A still farther progress in their intimacy produced another alteration in her opinion. She began to suspect that it was not “poor Lady Rachel” that did not know the world, but “poor Isabella,” who had never been taught to distinguish truth from falsehood, Bristol stones from diamonds.

Still, whether pitying Lady Rachel or mistrusting herself, Lady Rachel maintained her influence over the mind of Isabella. As long as she was at ease with Mr. Willoughby, and at peace with herself, she yielded to this influence; and there was scarcely a day that she did not pass a part of it in

the drawing-room of Lady Rachel Roper. But no sooner did she begin to grow unhappy, and to seek, in following the pernicious counsels of Mrs. Nesbitt, a remedy for her unhappiness, than a consciousness that Lady Rachel would not approve the regimen that she had adopted, made her abate in her visits to her. She was not always aware to what degree this abatement extended, until reminded of her negligence by some sarcastic remark of Lady Rachel, or by a coldness and reserve in her deportment, which Isabella could even less endure than her more open severity. Isabella would then make her peace by an increased assiduity, and although she sometimes sickened as she ascended Lady Rachel's stairs, it was but rarely that the sun-shine which she met within her apartments did not restore her to ease

and comfort the moment that she was seated.

It was in one of these intervals, in her attendance upon Lady Rachel, that Isabella had discovered the weakness of her own self-government; and, alarmed by the helpless situation in which she found herself, she cast all her hope upon Lady Rachel. The first moment of their interview she believed would be terrific, but the result she knew would be peace; and like one who, having dabbled with quacks, from a fear of the regular course of the knife, or the caustic, awakes at length to the sense of the danger incurred, and braves all sufferings so that life may be preserved, Isabella resolved to throw herself into the hands of Lady Rachel, and to do and to suffer all that she might prescribe.

The doors of Lady Rachel were al-

ways open to Isabella; and there were not any after Lady Rachel had quitted her dressing-room that Isabella had reason to believe would prevent her being received. Early rising was, in the estimation of Lady Rachel, one of the virtues; and Isabella calculated that her reception might be the gentler, the earlier she presented herself.

The clocks in the city and liberties of Westminster had not done sounding eleven, when Isabella broke in upon the morning studies of Lady Rachel. The book was immediately closed, and the hand was held out to welcome her, but the brow was cold and rigid.

“Do you come to offer me the dregs of your last night’s orgies?” said Lady Rachel; “or have the reflections they occasioned chased away the power of sleep from your eyes?”

“My dear Lady Rachel,” said Isa-

bella, “ why should you think that either is the case? Indeed, I am no slug-a-bed. Mamma always made us rise early. In fact, we had so much to do, that the day was scarcely long enough; and we always took a walk in the Park before breakfast; the morning air mamma thought so good for the complexion. So you see that it is no extraordinary effort in me to avail myself of your happy custom of early hours.”

“Umph!” said Lady Rachel, “and do I owe the honour of this visit to your having had lessons to learn, or to the care of your complexion?”

“To neither, indeed, my dear Lady Rachel,” returned Isabella, “although there are some lessons I would willingly learn,—lessons that would, perhaps, make the care of my complexion useless.”

“Very moral, and very sententious!

but not very explicit," returned Lady Rachel ; " however, I think I can understand you. What has put you, child, so much out of humour with the world of a sudden ?"

" Not of a *sudden*," replied Isabella. " I think I have liked it worse and worse every week since I began to know it."

" Where is your husband, child ?" said Lady Rachel.

" My dear Madam, what has that to do with my liking the world ? I am sure there is nothing that it contains, that Mr. Willoughby would not give me if I wished for it."

" Except his company," said Lady Rachel drily.

" Oh Lady Rachel !" said Isabella, " who would have thought that you would have made such an observation ?"

" And why not ?" said Lady Rachel ;

“you come to me to talk of your quarrels with the world, and are surprised that I should point out the cause of them.”

“Mr. Willoughby is not the cause of them,” said Isabella earnestly, “and to a wife”—

“Away with all common place maxims,” said Lady Rachel; “away with all equivocation. What but dissatisfaction at home could put you out of humour with a world which smiles but too much upon you? and if a wife complain to a friend, that friend ought to tell her the truth.”

“But did I complain of Mr. Willoughby?” asked Isabella.

“Yes,” returned Lady Rachel, “when you told me that there were lessons that you would willingly learn, and lessons that might make the care of your complexion useless, what was it but to tell me that your husband had no relish for

your present acquirements, or no taste for your beauty?

“Alas!” said Isabella, “nothing can be more true, and yet I am sure I did not mean to say it; and mamma always tells me that I am so happy, and that I ought to be so happy, that I really think I must be quite criminal to feel so sad and cast down as I do, almost perpetually.”

“Are *you sad and cast down*, my child?” said Lady Rachel; “how is that? when I hear of you as giving the tone to every society, when your name is in the mouth of every coxcomb, and when neither cost nor solicitude are spared to make you the most gilded of the butterflies that glitter through this gay town?”

“And after what you have discovered, my dear madam,” said Isabella, timidly and blushing, “cannot you see the reason of all this?”

“No, upon my word,” replied Lady Rachel, “except that you are dissipated and vain, and love dress.”

“How widely do you mistake my motives !” said Isabella. “I had flattered myself, that *you at least* would have done me more justice! How little do you know the poor Isabella, if you think that for her own pleasure she either leads the life she does, or bestows so much either time or money in adorning her person.”

“Does your husband then enjoin you to be at half a dozen places every evening? does he compel you to listen to the flattery of every fool who approaches you? does he condemn you to a continual renewal of the most expensive silks and the finest laces?”

“Yes, he does,” said Isabella warmly; “for he admires the same in others, and it is my duty not to be excelled in any thing that he likes.”

“Poor Duty!” said Lady Rachel, shrugging up her shoulders, “how hard is thy burthen!”

Is it *not* my duty,” cried Isabella eagerly, “to do every thing that Mr. Willoughby likes?”

“No!” replied Lady Rachel.

“But I have solemnly engaged to obey him,” urged Isabella.

“You had previously solemnly engaged to renounce the pomps and vanities of the world,” replied Lady Rachel.

“But, dear madam, is there not something due to the station we hold in life; to the expectations of the society in which we move?”

“Yes,” replied Lady Rachel; “provide things honest in the sight of all men. But you are too rapid in your transitions for the slowness of my intellect: I thought we were speaking of the duty of pleasing a husband;

and now it seems as if to please the world was the matter in question. Pray, child, which do you mean to make your paramount duty?"

"To please my husband, surely," said Isabella.

"And to mortify and outshine Lady Charlotte Dunstan," said Lady Rachel.

Isabella blushed.

"I am sure, my dear Lady Rachel," said she, "you would not have that woman triumph over me: you would not have me forget what I owe to myself."

"There is another creditor that you are bound to satisfy first," said Lady Rachel.

Isabella felt awed: yet she thought to herself that Lady Rachel had a very extraordinary way of making the most solemn subjects bear upon the commonest incidents of life, wholly unlike Mrs. Nesbitt's quotations and allu-

sions; and she intimated her thought, by gently remarking, that, "*just then*, she was not thinking of such things."

"Truly I believe you," said Lady Rachel: "you were thinking of laying aside the modest adornments of a virtuous wife, and of assuming the meretricious ornaments of a coquette. And you would call this duty!"

"What *would* you have me do?" said Isabella, with the tears starting in to her eyes.

"Your duty," replied Lady Rachel.

"Oh! that I knew it!" cried Isabella.

"It is written, where those that run may read," returned Lady Rachel.

"I have always been told," said Isabella, "that to please my husband, and to enjoy the innocent pleasures that are offered to me, and to secure the world's good opinion, was my duty. I have tried to do all this, and

yet you seem to think I have not fulfilled my obligation."

"Is this *all* your duty?" said Lady Rachel.

"Oh! not all, to be sure," said Isabella, "but —"

"Finish your sentence, child," said Lady Rachel.

"I do not know how," said Isabella. "Something, I confess, seems wanting: but I hope I have too much prudence, too much proper pride, to do anything that is wrong; and while I take care not to do so, surely I may be allowed to try every means in my power to prevent the machinations of a bad woman from estranging my husband's heart."

"If we do not differ," replied Lady Rachel, "upon the meaning of the words, 'anything wrong,' our dispute will be ended; but I apprehend that

neither prudence nor pride will be the best expositors of what is so."

"Can you tell me what would be so?" said Isabella, with an accent of the most earnest supplication; "for never poor mariner, that went to sea without his compass, was ever more at a loss which way to steer, than I am to know how to conduct myself in this world of shining surface and sunken rocks."

"Very metaphorical!" said Lady Rachel, "and what if I tell you that you have been accustomed to talk in metaphors till plain speech is either unintelligible or shocking to your ears?"

"It may be so," said Isabella, "for assuredly I find nothing in the maxims on which I have been instructed to rely, that brings me either direction in my doubts, or comfort in my sorrows."

"And how should they?" replied Lady Rachel, "when they all tend to

excite and inflame the grand disturbers of all that makes the peace and happiness of life? You have been educated, child, to be vain, envious, and ambitious; and can you wonder that in a world where there are hundreds who are greater adepts in these accomplishments than yourself, that you should be mortified, maligned, and held down to the very crucifying — not indeed of the sins and offences that war against the soul — but of every honest feeling of your heart, which may well bleed at every vein in such a contest?”

“Oh indeed,” said Isabella, “you do mamma injustice; she always told me that it was very foolish to be vain. She said, as you do, that it would make us unhappy. She said it was very low-minded to be envious; and although she did excite us to ambition, it was only the ambition to excel; and that, you know, my dear Lady Rachel, is

‘the glorious fault of Angels and of Gods.’ ”

“ Umph ! ” said Lady Rachel. “ I beg your pardon, child ; I had forgot that you do not love my umph. But, to give you quotation for quotation,

‘Aspiring to be gods, if angels fell,
Aspiring to be angels men rebel.’ ”

“ Well, but I am *not* ambitious,” said Isabella. “ I only wish that Mr. Willoughby would like to talk to me as well as he likes to talk to others ; and then I should not care who was greater, or finer, or more admired. I should not care who else said that Lady Charlotte was handsomer, or better dressed, or more entertaining than myself.”

“ And why should not this laudable end be obtained by laudable means ? ” said Lady Rachel. “ Are you not more likely to charm as an excellent original than as a bad copy ? ”

“ I fear my excellencies would not be to Mr. Willoughby’s taste,” said Isabella, with much sadness in her tone.

“ Then be it your aim to *exalt* his taste,” replied Lady Rachel; “ *that* is your duty. He *once* could taste what was just and pure. When he chose you, I persuaded myself that he had returned to his first love; beware that it is not your fault that he finds no relish for it. Foster not, for any selfish gratification, for any evanescent joy,— foster not, I charge you, his debasement.”

“ What a responsibility !” said Isabella. “ Have I not enough upon my hands to guard against my own faults, but must I be made answerable for those of Mr. Willoughby? Surely, my dear Lady Rachel, your moral is too severe. I thought that *you* would have pitied me. Many do, who have not half your kindness.”

“Insidious pity!” said Lady Rachel, with a tone of indignation ; and “why should I pity you? What has fallen short in all to which you looked for happiness when you married?”

“Had I not a right to expect that my husband would prefer me to every other individual of my sex?” said Isabella.

“No !” replied Lady Rachel, “such an expectation made not any part of the bond. Did it make any in the motives that induced you to accept Mr. Willoughby?”

“Oh ! Lady Rachel,” cried Isabella, “what searching questions do you ask ! and of such things as I never thought of before I was married, whatever I may have done since.”

“My poor child!” said Lady Rachel, with a softness in her accent and manner which she seldom suffered to appear, “if I probe you deeply,

it is not to give you pain, but to make you sensible where lies the cure of all your grievances. The fault is not yours. In words you were warned from vanity and from envy ; but every practical lesson engraved them on your heart. What was the strife for pre-eminence in every showy accomplishment, but the strife of vanity ? What was the struggle to cope with others, beyond the actual means of your situation, but envy of those above you ? You were to be too proud to be outdone ; you were to be ambitious of outstripping your contemporaries in the race of worldly glory. Nature had furnished you with the means ; and when Mr. Willoughby offered you his hand, the end seemed to be within your grasp. Did you stop to ask yourself for *what* Mr. Willoughby loved you ? Did you even ask whether he loved you *at all* ? Did

any one ask those questions for you? Did you question yourself, were you questioned by others, whether you loved Mr. Willoughby?"

Isabella drooped under this investigation.

"I know not how to answer you," she replied. "Surely there must be some misapprehension somewhere, or the same circumstances could not be seen so differently. I cannot recollect one doubt being suggested as to my accepting Mr. Willoughby. I was told that I could not do otherwise; and I was so overwhelmed with the enumeration of the sources of my future happiness, that I should have been treated as an idiot, I must have appeared one to myself, if I had hesitated to have accepted so brilliant an offer."

Of what then do you complain?" said Lady Rachel. "Has any of this brilliancy faded from your sight?"

“I confess, not any on which I reckoned before marriage, but — but — said Isabella, hesitating, “I did not know that I should love Mr. Willoughby as I do love him : I did not know that I could not bear that he should not love me better than any body else ; especially *that* Lady Charlotte, whom I was told he had so preferred me to ! Oh ! how were they mistaken that told me so !”

“Perhaps not so,” replied Lady Rachel : “but if you will put yourself into competition with the most finished coquette of the age, you must expect, and I should hope you would wish, to lose by the comparison. The contest is as unwise as it is unholy.”

“If I must not try to charm my husband in the way that he likes,” said Isabella, “and if he have no taste for the few good qualities that I really do possess, how much happier should I

have been if *he* had never *charmed me*; if I had been wise enough to have found my happiness, as I am told so many others do, rather in what their husbands *possess*, than from what they *are*."

"There is profanation in the wish," said Lady Rachel, sternly. "Did you not love your husband, you would ere this have been a cast-away. Cherish this love as you would do the immediate jewel of your soul; but purify it from all base emulation, from all the feculancies of rivalry, and let this reflection cheer you in the dreary way you have to tread, that had Mr. Willoughby desired a Lady Charlotte for his wife, he would not have chosen an Isabella."

"And having chosen her," said the dejected Isabella, "he seems but to exist for the Lady Charlotte whom he rejected. Ah! dear Lady Rachel! it

may be wrong to attempt to imitate, from any motives whatever, qualities intrinsically unamiable, but you cannot persuade me, but that if I *naturally* resembled Lady Charlotte more than I do, that I should be happier."

"And you would purchase happiness by resembling her?" asked Lady Rachel.

"I could wish to appear to do so," replied Isabella, "but I would not *be* all that I believe she is, no — not, I *think*, to be gazed on as I have sometimes seen Mr. Willoughby gaze on her."

"You would then wear the livery of vice, and keep the honour of virtue?" returned Lady Rachel. "You would do all in your power to confirm your husband in his preference to vice, and would still think yourself virtuous. Remember, however, that although it may be ingenious to deceive without

lying, that you cannot deceive without sinning — and think you that when you have thus pampered the vicious tastes of your husband, that he will love you the better for any virtue that you may have had the good luck to retain ?”

“What then is it that I must do?” asked the poor Isabella, mournfully ; “must I suffer Lady Charlotte to hold my husband’s heart without a struggle?”

“As your quarrel is just,” replied Lady Rachel, “take care that your warfare is honest. What is it that you would wish that your husband should think you? be that thing as nearly as you can ; and if you are not happy you will deserve to be so.”

“At eighteen only *deserve* to be happy!” said Isabella, with a sigh.

“To *deserve* to be happy, is the highest aim of the longest life,” re-

turned Lady Rachel, "and is often the only reward on this side Heaven for all the virtues to which human nature is equal. Should you attain so high an eminence at twice eighteen, you would be an enviable being."

"But I was always told," said Isabella, "that if I were *not wanting to myself*, I should be happy."

"That is a phrase I do not understand," said Lady Rachel; "can you explain it to me?"

"I believe," said Isabella, with a conscious dropping of her eyelids, that it means not to suffer myself to be trampled upon."

"Umph!" said Lady Rachel; "well child, go home, and try all these fine maxims upon which your boasted education has been grounded, and when you have proved their worth, return and tell me, and I shall be instructed too."

This was too much for the mortified Isabella; tears stood in her eyes.

“I will go home,” said she, rising, “for I see that you despise me, and where I had hoped to have found a friend, I meet only with the severity of a critic.”

“And may not that very severity be an act of the truest friendship?” returned Lady Rachel; “you tread on breaking ice; shall I be nice in the means that may place you safely on firm ground?”

“That I am in danger I feel,” replied Isabella, “but I believe the cause to be in others rather than myself. I may be weak, but when I mean no harm, nor would do any, why should I think my footing insecure?”

“Away with the imbecility of such sentimental arguing,” cried Lady Rachel. “How can you be secure when competition is your religion, pre-

eminence your Heaven, degradation your Hell? In the stillness of your chamber, ponder, weigh, and determine whether your religion is holy, your heaven the region of happiness, or your powers of endurance equal to the alternative — if you are satisfied with the course in which you are, pursue it : if not, come to me again, and we will endeavour to find one more pure, more safe, more happy. And now for the present farewell ; at this moment an angel's tongue would not inform your understanding."

CHAP. XV.

“Methinks in thee some blessed spirit speaks?”

SHAKSPEARE.

ISABELLA withdrew, dissatisfied with Lady Rachel, and angry with herself. In the bravery of her sorrow she had sought the counsel of Lady Rachel, and had boasted to herself that she would not shrink from its severity; but, with the coward petulance of a child, she had dashed the salutary cup from her rather than endure its bitterness. She had pertinaciously defended maxims which her heart con-

demned, and she had refused to admit truths which her reason acknowledged. The still small voice within now told her all this, and she was mortified and vexed; but as she was not yet truly humble, she wanted alike the docility and the courage to encounter the consequences of principles that, although she might dispute, she could not doubt. She continued even in her incipient penitence to reason perversely: “Must she submit to be less charming to the senses of her husband, in the hope of being more approved by his reason? — must she be content with *deserving* his love, and let another enjoy it? — could she sacrifice the important present for an uncertain hereafter? — and could she resign herself to a passive hopelessness, when the only mitigation to her anguish was in action, in renewed attempts to do herself justice?”

“Lady Rachel does not feel as I do, thought she; it is easy to trace out the rugged path of narrow rectitude, — it is difficult to walk in it! And how am I assured that this *is* the *only* path that is honest and safe? — how many, both of the good and the wise, think otherwise than Lady Rachel, and act as they think? Was it discreet of Lady Rachel, thus at once to set before me all the difficulties that I should have to encounter in the course which she proposes? difficulties from within and from without? Had she known the weakness of which I was guilty last night, she would have been more scrupulous of frightening me from her by her rigidity. I can believe that her moral is more safe, but the compassion of Sir Charles would have been more soothing.”

These and many other such questions and reasonings engaged the mind

of Isabella ; but neither her heart nor her understanding returned her any satisfactory solution to her doubts — accustomed to move in the darkness of error, she could scarcely bear the light of truth ; and it was perhaps in the hope of being confirmed in the wisdom of the maxims in which she had been trained, that on her return home from Lady Rachel's, she called at her mother's.

If such were her hope, she was disappointed. Lady Jane was absent, and she found her eldest sister with swelled eyes and a clouded countenance.

“What is the matter?” cried Isabella, in a pitying accent.

“Oh Isabella,” returned Harriet, “how happy are you to be married? with you, this eternal cry of ‘be first,’ in all we do, is over ; you have gained

the prize, and may rest on your arms, and be at peace."

"What has happened?" said Isabella.

"Nothing much out of the common way," replied Harriet; "but it has vexed me more than usual because mamma was so cross; perhaps I *was* saucy, for one cannot always be a child you know; and so, to punish me, she has taken Elizabeth to the Park, and has left me at home; and she says, that except I humble myself, I shall not go to Mrs. Frampton's to-night — but I am resolved not to humble myself — I see no reason why I should humble myself to mamma, when she is always telling me to remember my own dignity; however, it is all mamma's fault, not mine."

"What is all this about?" said Isabella. "Oh it all happened about the music last night; mamma wished par-

ticularly that I should excel Miss Thompson, because you know Mrs. Thompson thinks nobody understands education as well as she does, and because you know a certain person was to be present. I am sure I wished it too, but I really had a cold, and so mamma is sure that I did not take pains; and the truth is, that she was applauded and listened to a great deal more than I was, and especially by *him*, and how could I help this?—but mamma has done nothing but scold, and quarrel with me about it ever since. She says it signifies nothing what pains she takes when she is so ill seconded, and that she cannot expect that good luck will always stand her friend; for she will have it that it was luck only that married you, for she says that you were often abominably careless, and that she had hoped better things from me, but that now she despairs; with

a great deal more of the same, that you have heard a thousand times repeated. I do wish I was married, and then nobody would care whether I sang in or out of tune."

"Very true!" said Isabella, with a deep-drawn sigh, and giving her sister all the comfort of which the case would admit, and which had often been administered to her upon similar occasions, she proceeded home to meditate on the comfort in the progress, and the happiness in the result, of living to the opinions of others rather than our own. She made something like a resolution to escape from such slavery, did more justice to the wisdom as well the purity of Lady Rachel's moral, and felt more at peace with herself for doing so.

On entering her house Isabella encountered her husband, who was just

returned from his excursion into the country.

“ Oh Isabella, is it you ?” said Mr. Willoughby ; “ how do you do ? you look pale,” and with these words he passed her, and went into his own room.

Isabella also went into hers, and there she wept plentifully.

Ah ! thought she, Harriet little knows that matrimony is no safeguard from vexation. I *could* find my indemnifications, but I have no heart but for Mr. Willoughby. I will advise Harriet never to marry the man whom she is likely to love — but is not this the breaking ice of which Lady Rachel spoke ? did she not say, that in the wish not to love my husband, there was profanation ? that but for this love I should have been a cast-away ? how cruel did I think the words when she uttered them ! and yet, perhaps, they

are alarmingly true ! resentment does at times stir up such thoughts ! — and *with* such thoughts can I really mean no harm ? can I be sure that I would not do any ? could prudence, could pride, shut my heart against the soothing of sympathy, or the desire of revenge ? — revenge ! — what a horrible word ! — Oh, holy love ! defend me from the wanderings of all my baser passions ! I will clasp thee to my bosom as my shield, and, so guarded, surely I can have no danger to fear.”

The morning had been one of mortification and sorrow, and Isabella's countenance retained the traces of the workings of her mind. Of this she was conscious as she cast the last glance on the looking-glass before she stepped into her carriage.

With these witch-like looks, thought she, I had better stay at home. Were I under mamma's command she would

not let me stir out. — But I can think no more, — my head aches, — my heart is heavy; I *must* try what society will do for me; and I *ought* not to care how I look in any eyes but those of Mr. Willoughby; and if he see my pale cheeks a second time he may think that that I am ill, and perhaps he may be sorry.

It was not, however, her fate this evening to meet Mr. Willoughby; but she did meet Sir Charles Seymour, and he approached her with so much respect and concern in his countenance, as made her ready to ask, “what is the matter?” — she had, however, no occasion for the inquiry.

“My dear Mrs. Willoughby,” said Sir Charles, “how happy I am to see you! I scarcely thought that I could have had the pleasure to night; but you are ill! had you not better have

staid at home? although I admire you more than ever for the effort you are making.”

“ Really,” said Isabella, “ it is no great effort to come out with the headache, which is the whole matter. I thought a little dissipation would do me good.”

“ Were it *only* the headache?” said Sir Charles, “ but how amiable is all this! Well!—I find your truant is come home. Does he tell you how gay they have been at Danesfield?”

“ I have scarcely seen Mr. Willoughby,” returned Isabella; “ but they could not be otherwise than gay. The very purpose of the meeting was festivity.”

“ Lady Charlotte Dunstan says,” returned Sir Charles, “ that she really never spent so delightful a week; the party was so complete! all were there who would have been welcome;

all absent who would have lessened the enjoyment. Those were her very words."

"Was Mr. Dunstan there?" said Isabella.

"What a malicious question," replied Sir Charles, "and something superfluous too; for you must know that he was excluded alike by 'those who would not have been welcome,' and 'those who would have lessened the enjoyment'."

Isabella was resolved to be prudent; she only replied,

"Can you tell me who were there?"

"Oh yes! I know the set, but I think there are not any that would interest you. I wish you would draw Willoughby from it; take my word, it will do him no good."

Isabella was determined that she would not say that she had no influence over Mr. Willoughby; yet she

did say it : — not at that very moment, but in five minutes afterwards, when Sir Charles, with an interest in her happiness that flattered, and a precision, which left her no doubt of the accuracy of his information, conveyed to her understanding in ambiguous, but not doubtful phrases, at once the attachment of Mr. Willoughby to Lady Charlotte, and the high play in which he was engaged with her brother.

At this moment Isabella forgot every thing but the balm which Sir Charles's sympathy afforded to her lacerated heart. Eager to be mistress of every circumstance of her misfortune, and hoping for assistance and support from Sir Charles's friendship, and his knowledge of the world, she was listening to him with an attention, and an interest, which to those who did not know the subject of their dis-

course, and it was carried on in the lowest tone possible, would admit of but one interpretation, when the words, "Sin not!" — fell upon her ear, in a voice solemn and impressive. Both she and her companion started :

"Who's that?" said Sir Charles, looking angrily around.

"A friend!" cried Isabella, as she turned her quick eye in succession on every countenance within her view; but not a single feature of any betrayed any interest in her, her virtues, or her vices, all were grave or gay, for themselves alone.

"It is strange!" said Isabella.

"It is intolerable!" said Sir Charles, "that cursed screen has sheltered the impertinent! but such liberties are not to be endured."

"The Oracle, however, has spoken plainly," said Isabella, "and I will

obey its dictates." And as she spoke she arose, and turned from Sir Charles.

"My dear Mrs. Willoughby, is it possible?" said he, "I could not have believed that your admirably constituted mind could have been so affected! don't you see the trick?"

"Where can be the trick in so plain an admonition," replied Isabella; "an admonition that I must feel humbled to find it supposed, however unfoundedly, that I wanted."

"You! My dear Mrs. Willoughby, you!" — cried Sir Charles, "do you believe that those insolent words were directed to you? of every creature in the room you perhaps are the only individual to whom they cannot apply."

"Yet I shall not be afraid to take them to myself," said Isabella, calmly, "such advice is as the common blessings of nature; the property of all; the beneficence of heaven, in which

all may share, without encroaching on the rights of others. — Good night.”

“ Leave me not, I beseech you,” said Sir Charles. “ I guess the quarter from whence the insolence has proceeded ; and nothing can be further from the wish of the impertinent warner, than that you should take the warning ; nay do not go : let not the artful malice of a devil prevail over the spirit of an angel.”

“ I must be gone,” said Isabella. “ I go to meditate on what I have heard ; on all that I have heard, through this extraordinary day. — Farewell.”

Nor did Sir Charles farther endeavour to detain her — he felt that the moment was unpropitious to his sophistry ; and though he doubted not but that a fresh wound to her vanity, and a recurring mortification to her affections, would, at no very distant

period, enable him to re-asume, and to confirm his powers over her mind, yet he was himself startled at what had happened, and alarmed by such a proof that his designs were penetrated by some friend of Isabella's, who had taken this method of at once shewing him that he was understood, and of putting her upon her guard. He had indeed endeavoured to insinuate to Isabella, that the whole was nothing more than a piece of jealous mischief on the part of Lord Thomas Orville, yet he had no suspicion that he had any thing to do with the words that had been spoken, but wholly imputed them to some unknown guardianship which was extended over Isabella.

CHAP. XVI.

“ Her words breathe fire celestial, and impart
New vigour to her soul, that sudden caught
The generous flame.”— THOMSON.

ISABELLA retired with an unruffled countenance, and an apparent composure, which ill agreed with the tumult that so singular an incident, added to all that she had heard from Sir Charles, had caused within.

She could not doubt but that the words were directed to her; she did not believe that they proceeded in any

way from Lord Thomas Orville; who, although she had seen him in the course of the evening, she had reason to think had left the rooms sometime before.

But from whom then could such an injunction come? what was there in her conduct? what was there even in her heart, that could call for so pointed a warning? at this moment she was sure that she was “more sinned against than sinning.” It was from the evil habits into which her husband seemed to be falling; it was from the loss of his affections, rather than from any wandering of her own, that her sorrows flowed. Who that knew her intimately, but must know this? and who but one who did so know her; one who was interested in her good conduct, and her happiness, would so have spoken? her thoughts glanced towards Lady Rachel: she had already warned

her of the danger of her situation ; but it could not be her.

Was there then another to whom it could appear that she was on the precipice of vice ? Lady Rachel was not then singular. It was not the misanthropy of age ; it was not seclusion from the world ; the having out-lived its pleasures and its usages, that had produced the admonition which she had received. It rather seemed to have come from one who partook of the play around him, and who knew better than herself, all its intricacies, and all its cheateries. This called for thinking ; — for self-scrutiny ; — for a careful tracing of the real direction, which her various and mingled feelings were actually taking. She returned home that she might, in the solitude which she knew awaited her there, pursue the investigation without interruption.

In the last twenty-four hours, Isabella had lived half a century. — She awoke as from a dream : — she saw at once her errors and her dangers, nor could she find in all the moral that she had ever been taught, correction for the one, or safe-guard for the other.

Under the influence of this moral, she had in the short space of a few weeks, gone astray in two different directions. The pensive inaction into which she had fallen or the first consciousness of the indifference of her husband, she had dignified with the name of “ virtuous suffering ;” she had indulged in all the dangerous sentiment of self compassion, and in morbid murmurings of the insufficiency of this world’s good, and she had rather soothed her self-love, by a secret hope of becoming an object of pity and admiration, than set herself to remedy the evil under which she

drooped, by bringing into day the genuine excellencies of her character. Aroused from this sentimental supineness by the touch of jealousy, and stimulated by the worldly wisdom of Mrs. Nesbitt, she had rushed at once into the contrary extreme; and, adopting in its full force the only principle of which she had ever heard, she resolved not to be "out-done," at whatever cost she might bear away the prize. Every real vice of the heart, and every factitious virtue of the imagination, were called into action, by a principle so lofty in its pretensions, and so grovelling in the means of attaining its end. The check which she had met with in her career, by the extraordinary incident of the evening, had given her a moment's pause: and she was astonished and terrified by finding how far already from the path of rectitude she had

been carried by a maxim which she had been accustomed to consider as the stimulator to every generous thought.

It had made her deaf to the warnings of Lady Rachel ; it had exposed her to the treacherous flattery of Sir Charles Seymour ; it had made her a party in the censure of her husband ; it had aggravated every painful feeling ; and it had nearly converted her wish for redress, into a purpose of retaliation !

The evil was of tremendous magnitude ; but where was the remedy ? Isabella thought that it could only be found in a frank confession of her faults, and in the wisdom of Lady Rachel.

To Lady Rachel, without hesitation, and with a hope, rather than a fear of receiving from her the chastise-

ment that she felt she deserved, did she repair.

Isabella repeated her visit at the same early hour, at which it had been made the day before; as being sure not only that she should be admitted, but that she should find Lady Rachel disengaged.

She was admitted, and she did find Lady Rachel disengaged; but she was by no means the Lady Rachel of the preceding morning! the folio was not closed on the entrance of Isabella, the hand was not stretched out to welcome her; there was no peculiar expression of countenance; there was not even the caustic remark, or the satiric reproach which, though it might wound the ear, re-assured the heart, by proving the interest that was excited. All was distant, stately, and ceremonious!—the very tone in which the accommodation of a chair was offer-

ed her, smote upon the feelings of Isabella with the sharpness of a two edged sword; but Isabella was too truly humbled, too intimately sensible that she deserved the reception that she met with, to be moved by any spark of resentment, or to feel any fear, but that she should not be able to restore herself to so much favour, as to secure her the correction which she so much desired, and obtain for her the counsel she so much wanted.

“ My dear Lady Rachel,” said the trembling Isabella, “ do not terrify me with that air of estrangement, and forgetfulness? I do indeed deserve that you should withdraw a kindness which I have so little benefited by, but I cannot support such a loss.

“ I come to humble myself before you ; I come to confess that you are right, that I am wrong ; to acknowledge the error of the way I have been

in, and to benefit by the benevolent wisdom, which but yesterday promised to point out one, more pure, more safe, more happy."

"The repentance is sudden! the wants must be pressing!" returned Lady Rachel, without relaxing one feature of her face.

"Oh, if you will not touch me with your golden sceptre," said Isabella, "I shall die!"

"There then," said Lady Rachel, touching Isabella's hand with an ivory rule which lay on the table, "that is as near as I can go to golden sceptres. And now, —— What wilt thou Isabella?"

Isabella scarcely knew what she would. She had a long story to tell; but it was rather of the progress of her own feelings, than of what had been done by others. Yet the extraordinary incident of the evening be-

fore, was what she most wished to divulge ; yet how divulge it without leaving the impression on Lady Rachel's mind that the warning was deserved.

“ If the thing were possible,” said Isabella, “ I could almost fancy that you were at Lady Terant's last night.”

“ And why so ?” said Lady Rachel ; “ what phantasmagoria was playing off there, that could put such a fancy into your head ? ”

“ The deception was not of the eye, but of the ear,” replied Isabella. “ I certainly heard a voice which came from I know not where, and it uttered words which none but you have a right to utter.”

“ Have some compassion on my nerves,” said Lady Rachel. “ If the being seen where we are not, is a sign that we shall soon be seen no more ; the being heard when we do not speak,

may be equally prophetic of our approaching silence."

"And of a future office!" said Isabella, "for let the words come from whom they would, I am sure they were prompted by a guardian angel."

"What were the words?" said Lady Rachel.

"Sin not!" said Isabella, deeply blushing.

"They could not apply to you, child," returned Lady Rachel; "you who mean no harm, and would do none."

"Oh spare me!" said Isabella; "my meanings, I am now painfully convinced, are no security for my actions."

"Were you sinning?" asked Lady Rachel.

"I believe I was," said Isabella. "I am sure I was in the way of temp-

tation; and without any very strong determination of resistance."

"And the tempter was Sir Charles Seymour," replied Lady Rachel; "but where were all the doughty champions under whose banners you were so stoutly to combat the world, the flesh, and the devil? did not pride cry 'Avaunt, traitor?' — Was 'Prudence' asleep at her post? — Was 'the world's good word' silent? — And was 'taste' reconciled to 'degradation'?"

"I abjure all such counsellors—all such defenders," cried Isabella; "under their influence I am become at once weak and self-confident; and there seems to me more safety and strength in the simple words, "sin not," uttered by my invisible friend, than in all I ever heard of the 'dignity of pride,' the 'security of prudence,'

the ‘sanction of the world,’ or the ‘award of good taste’.”

“You have spoke truth and candour,” said Lady Rachel, with an emotion which astonished Isabella; “truth and candour which I never! no never! again expected to have seen equalled! —blessed God,” continued she, raising her eyes to heaven, “I thank thee, for this renewal of one of thy fairest works!”—Then, with something of super-human power, repressing in an instant the ebullition of passion into which she had been betrayed, her features resumed their wonted expression; and, throwing her arms around Isabella, “let me embrace you,” said she; “from this moment we are friends; you have weaknesses, you have faults; but they are the faults of human-nature, not the monstrous productions of artificial life; they are the growth of your own heart, not

the transplanted poison of the world of fashion : for the one there is an appointed remedy ; the other neither admits of, nor desires a cure. The heart is gangrened ! the vital principle is destroyed ! nothing short of a miracle can restore it."

" My dear Lady Rachel," said Isabella, melting into tears, " how kind ! how good you are ! and cannot you guess what kindred spirit spoke in that soft still voice which I heard last night ? "

" No, indeed, I cannot *guess*," said Lady Rachel, " for I *know*."

Isabella started. " Are you indeed a witch ? " said she.

" I mean not to make any mystery of the matter," returned Lady Rachel. " I must not suffer such a trifling circumstance to fasten itself on your imagination ; for your imagination is one of the enemies against which we have

to guard ; you must not enter every place of resort with the impression that some Sylph or Genii is hovering over you ; trick, management, and machinery of every kind, I abominate. Your Oracle was Lord Burghley.”

“ And what could lead Lord Burghley to think that I stood in need of such a warning ? ” said Isabella.

“ To one so well versed in the ways of the world, as Lord Burghley is,” replied Lady Rachel, “ there was enough to shew the usefulness of such a caution.”

“ I might more readily admit the usefulness of such an admonition,” replied Isabella, “ had the person in question been Lord Thomas Orville ; but Sir Charles Seymour—— ”

“ Had the person been Lord Thomas Orville,” said Lady Rachel, “ you would not have been worth a caution. The woman who can listen for a mo-

ment to him who boastingly outrages at once the primordial order of his God, the holy institution from whence flow all the charities and all the decencies of human existence, and the sacred dictates of truth, deserves the fate which she provokes, and may without any breach of the ‘royal law of love,’ be left to undergo it; but the smooth, the plausible, the friendly Sir Charles Seymour; the observer of all decorum; the gentle cautioner against every impropriety, the *generous* reporter of the vices of the husband that he may undermine the virtues of the wife, although scarcely less to be detested than the more open violator of the most sacred obligations, is much more dangerous to inexperienced innocence; for suspicion is not the offspring of virtue; it is the hateful produce of depravity, or the painful result of confidence betrayed.”

“ But is Sir Charles Seymour such a man ?” said Isabella, with affright.

“ He is,” said Lady Rachel. “ You fled from the tiger, to take shelter in the serpent’s den.”

“ Oh ! how I have been deceived !” said Isabella.

“ It could scarcely be otherwise,” replied Lady Rachel.

“ How blest am I,” said Isabella, “ to have had so kind and so wise a friend as Lord Burghley. But what could move him to such energetic efforts in my favour ?”

“ His inducement to such exertions,” returned Lady Rachel, “ belongs to a piece of family history, which perhaps you will challenge my delicacy, as you have done once before, for giving you ; but the affection and respect that we owe to the most sacred relations in life are not grounded on the impeccability of their objects ;

and the weakness from whence we must turn away our eyes may yet be innocently the subject of our knowledge, without furnishing a reason to so frail a creature as is the human animal, why we should not love the kind and good qualities that are in unison with it. In a few words, Lord Burghley should have been your father, if Lady Jane had not preferred the choice of a higher rank than any that Lord Burghley was then likely ever to have raised her to, to the immediate companionship of a most excellent and agreeable man, with a moderate competence.

Lord Burghley was not only rejected, but he had but too much cause for being disappointed; and the disappointment pierced even to the heart's core. But he was not only an ardent lover, he was a constant one; and thus thwarted in the first object of his heart, his affections have

ever since hovered over the offspring of the woman whom he had hoped to have made his wife. On *you* his best hopes have rested; and it would be a second tearing asunder of his heart-strings, if you were to be lost to him by the indulgence of too fervent feelings, as your mother was, by too calculating a head.

She married the man whom she did not love; and was what the world calls happy. Hence her opinion that love is no necessary ingredient in married happiness. But as your father's passion, having nothing to feed on but the charms of the person, scarcely survived the first year of their marriage, she concludes that no woman ever preserved the heart of her husband for a longer period: an opinion as false as it is pernicious; but it served to soothe a vanity that was mortified by the shortness of the empire of her beauty. Her

passions were calm ; she was therefore prudent, and she was content to await patiently until the death of your grandfather should put her in possession of what she valued more than the love or even the admiration of her husband. But your father died before he attained the eminence to which Lady Jane aspired, and a younger brother of your father's has succeeded to the title and the property which were to have given rank and opulence to Lady Jane.

“ Your mother's jointure, and the provision for yourself and sisters were below your situation in life ; and Lady Jane never having felt a wish, but what she supposed that money might have supplied, we may pardon her, if she believes that in seeking to make her children rich, she does all in her power to make them happy.”

“ And could my mother have mar-

ried the man who so truly loved her?" said Isabella, "and who was so worthy of her love? and did she prefer any other blessing that this world can give? oh fatal choice! if not to herself, to her children — but I will love Lord Burghley in her stead — and cannot you, my dear Lady Rachel, and this good Lord Burghley, teach me how to make my husband love me? He has not a cold heart; I am sure he has not; he is kind, he is indulgent! I know not why he chose me, if he did not like me. Perhaps he finds me too much a child; too little his equal to take any pleasure in my conversation; — and, with him, I am always so timid! — but can you not teach me to be important in his eyes? — not like Lady Charlotte! — no, I will never again try to resemble her; — but something perhaps I may become, that he will like as well, and approve more."

Lady Rachel sighed deeply; so as

Isabella had never heard her sigh before ; so as Isabella did not think she could have sighed.

“There was a time,” returned she, “that I should have replied ‘yes!’—but I dare not flatter you. Twelve years of the indurating process of the ways of the world, may have converted a heart of flesh into one of stone. Hopes, long dead, revived when he first brought you to me as his wife ; but too soon I found that even his marriage was but another link in that chain of worldly calculation with which he had been so long bound. He had drank too freely at the fountain of others, not to be careful to secure his own — he had been too long the world’s idol not to wish to be the object of its envy. Your beauty secured the one point ; the sedulousness of your education, and Lady Jane’s reputation for moral prudence, set him at

rest on the other. Your person could not but charm his senses, but he troubled himself not to inquire whether the good qualities that were imputed to you, were of a kind to engage his fancy, or to secure his heart.—My dear child, I fear that heart must be purified before they can be so. He has been too long used to stimulants, to relish the simple fare of retiring love, and unsophisticated virtue. But if you cannot raise him to your level, you must not sink to his; there must be no doing of evil, that good may come.—You must do all for yourself, that you can do *honestly*—and leave the rest to Providence.”

The tears flowed fast down Isabella’s glowing cheeks, as Lady Rachel pronounced these last words. “I am *very* wretched,” said she.

“I will allow you to say so,” returned Lady Rachel, “because you

are new to sorrow ; and I will only hope that you may never know by fatal comparison how far beyond the truth is the strength of your expression."

"What can be worse," said Isabella, "than to be told that my husband will never love me?"

"I have not told you so," replied Lady Rachel. "I have expressed my fears, but I have not said that I have no hopes ; still less have I presumed to say that there are none. There are sentimental quacks, I know, who pretend to give a recipe for gaining and preserving a husband's heart, as easily as they would give a cure for the tooth-ache. We meet with such wonderful performances in plays, and romances ; where the rooted bad habits of years are eradicated by the shifting of a scene,—by the sight of a picture,—by a little manœuvring on the part

of the wife,—but never in real life. I deal in no such juggling. Reformation is the work of mortification, or the produce of time; and the only cistus I can recommend as a charm for a husband is patient endurance, and a steady perseverance in the practise of affectionate virtue: in any case your own love will be a mitigation, not an aggravation, of the evil. The virtuous love of a wife is a fund of happiness that no misfortune can exhaust; — but you must discharge it of all rancour, of all envy, of all jealousy; you must purify it till you can present it at the foot of the throne of mercy, as a plea for the safety of its object, when that object seems to be regardless of his own.”

Isabella felt her heart warmed, — her mind raised. She looked on Lady Rachel as if she would by one cabalistic word impart to her powers so

much, as she thought, beyond all natural attainment. But there was no mystery in the instruction that Lady Rachel had to give; yet she seemed to Isabella to be a setter-forth of "strange doctrine," when she talked of lowliness of mind, "whence each esteemed others better than themselves;" of "charity that seeketh not her own," as the only sure foundation of "peace of mind," of "joy unfeigned," and of "rejoicing evermore." Yet all was easy of comprehension, compared with her absolute prohibition that she should hate Lady Charlotte.

"Dear, dear Lady Rachel, how can I help it?" said Isabella.

"By pitying her," replied Lady Rachel; "and there is not a more pitiable object to be seen than Lady Charlotte. The favourite of nature and of fortune, she wants nothing but goodness to be as happy as consists

with mortality ; and yet be assured that your eye scarcely ever rests on a more miserable creature. To be revenged on a man, who had not, however, injured her, she has made herself the property of another, whom she equally hates and despises ;—torn by passions, which are but the more ravenous the more they are fed, she subsists on poison, and nourishes a worm within, which is even now corroding her beauty, her good name, her temporal and eternal felicity.”

Isabella shuddered. “And I was about to have engaged in the same career!” said she, with anguish in her tone.

“You were,” replied Lady Rachel, “but with less excuse than Lady Charlotte. She is by nature ardent and daring,—you gentle and diffident;—in her first transgressions she followed but the impulses of an impe-

tuous temperament ; when you began to go wrong you had to struggle against the restraints of timidity, the shackles of modesty ; — all within, pushed her forward in the course ; with you all withheld you ! Learn to pity Lady Charlotte, and to be grateful for yourself.”

“ I shall certainly be more happy if I can pity Lady Charlotte,” replied Isabella ; “ for certainly I have not had an easy moment since I first tried to excel her. My mind has been in such tumults, my temper has been so easily ruffled ! I have felt so vehemently ! I really think that I have hated Lady Charlotte more than I have loved Mr. Willoughby.”

“ Pour the oil of humility on the raging waves of vanity and envy,” said Lady Rachel, “ and you will find that a virtuous love, even when unrequited, is a source of pleasure. It will enable

you to look *down* (to use a phrase of your old school) upon Lady Charlotte; it will give you dignity in your own eyes; it will make you less diffident; and all this lofty structure will be grounded on humility."

"Ah! dear Lady Rachel," said Isabella, "do you not speak parables? How can I be less diffident when I am more humble?"

"Diffidence is not humility," said Lady Rachel. "You were diffident because you were anxious to excel: you will be humble because you will be content to be excelled."

All this was new to Isabella, but it was very soothing. The tumult of her mind abated; and, without the change of any one outward circumstance in her favour since she had quitted her own house, she returned to it calmed, at peace with herself, and hopeful, even beyond what Lady Rachel had

encouraged her to be, that the day would come when she should be as dear to Mr. Willoughby as he was to her.

CHAP. XVII.

“ This affliction has a taste as sweet
As any cordial drop.”

SHAKSPEARE.

FROM this day the course of Isabella's life was changed. Hitherto she had sought to attain the first object of her wishes by assimilating her manners and her character to whatever she conceived was liked by the vitiated taste of her husband; from this time she pursued the same end, by endeavouring to lead his taste to ap-

prove of the character and manners naturally her own. Without lessening her attachment, she had received the impression that the being which had appeared so perfect in her eyes, and in whose praise she had believed that every suffrage united, was not so spotless as she had conceived; not even so praiseworthy as he had once been; not so excellent as she was confident that he might become. The world had then misled him: it should be her care to restore him to himself; to restore him to the good opinion of Lady Rachel; to be happy herself—happy, perhaps, as no other human creature had ever been!

Such were the visions of youthful hope. If they were unsubstantial, they were not unuseful; they did not dazzle to betray; on the contrary, they came in aid of Lady Rachel's moral, and the conviction of her own understand-

ing. Every day's experience confirmed the truth both of one and the other ; and Isabella rose in her own estimation, the less she struggled for superiority over others.

But it was not only to herself that Isabella appeared to be another person. With little apparent alteration in her course of life, the spirit from which she acted was wholly changed ; and this alone gave a freedom and dignity to all she did, that converted the timidity of a lovesick girl into the modest confidence of an affectionate wife. The effect of such a conversion was felt by all who approached her.

Mrs. Nesbitt, with uplifted hands and eyes, wondered what had happened to her dear Mrs. Willoughby ! There were no complaints now ! no consultations how to counteract Lady Charlotte ! and yet, for her part, she saw no difference in the abominable

ways of going on between that odious woman and Mr. Willoughby. But no doubt Mrs. Willoughby had begun to find that she had better enjoy what she could get, than cry for what was not to be had. Yet if she had not been so tame-spirited she might have had *all*. She had been listening to some *mighty good sort of a person*, she supposed; while, if she had followed her advice, she might have trampled her rival under her feet. But it was not the first time that the wisdom of Ahitophel had been baffled by the cunning of a Hushai; and if dear Mrs. Willoughby was happy, she should be content.

It was no longer necessary for Isabella to seek the assistance of any one to repress the impertinence of Lord Thomas Orville. A word, a look, would awe him into silence; and, as he recoiled defeated from her pre-

sence, he cursed the pride which so well aped virtue. But Isabella's newly-assumed powers were felt most by Sir Charles Seymour.

There was no marked withdrawal on the part of Isabella from the familiarity and good understanding that had been between them. It would have been impossible for any indifferent observer to have seen any change in their intercourse ; but Sir Charles felt the ground he was losing in every word that passed between them. There was a publicity and unconcernedness in all she said, that threw him back into the common multitude of those who called themselves her friends, which, while it left him nothing to complain of, convinced him that she was no longer the dupe of his treacherous pity for herself, or his perfidious friendship for her husband.

Isabella could not but be sensible

of the eminence that she had attained in society, by simply doing right ; by being less solicitous for the immediate effect, than for the peace of mind which such conduct would ultimately afford her — she thought it wonderful ! — almost miraculous ! She talked of it to Lady Rachel as a kind of fairy-gift that she owed to her supernatural science. Lady Rachel referred her to the book of all wisdom for a solution of the mystery ; and Isabella, the more she studied the sacred volume, the more she blessed the hour when she had submitted herself to the guidance of lady Rachel.

Isabella could now endure to seat herself by Lady Charlotte, and by so doing she came oftener into contact with Mr. Willoughby than she would otherways have done. She had lost a degree of that unwholesome sense of his superiority, which had so fre-

quently closed her lips when he was within hearing. This circumstance no longer kept her silent.

There had sprung up between herself and Lord Burghley an intimacy and freedom of conversation, arising from her gratitude for his guardianship, and his desire to promote her interests, that made him an almost constant attendant upon her steps. The seat that he was always most eager to secure for her was that in the closest vicinity to Mr. Willoughby; and there, seated by her side, or resting on the back of her chair, he would engage her in discourse upon every topic that he could imagine would engage the attention of her careless husband. Isabella, no longer afraid to give utterance to her thoughts or her feelings, shewed that she had opinions and tastes; and she had sometimes the exquisite pleasure of hearing Mr. Willoughby say, as he

listened to what passed, and sometimes joined in the conversation, "that is so true, as Isabella observed!" — "I dare say Isabella can tell us!" — "Oh! that is a matter that Isabella knows better than I do!"

Isabella, upon such occasions, was in danger of falling back into the error of thinking Mr. Willoughby nothing less than a demi-god, and nothing perhaps kept her true to her newly awakened sense that he was but too wholly mortal, except the connection which continued to subsist between him and Lady Charlotte. There was nothing however, in this connection that violently outraged the customs of the world in which they all lived; nothing that fixed the stigma of guilt on either of the parties. There was a carelessness and openness in the attentions of Mr. Willoughby towards Lady Charlotte that seemed to say there was no-

thing between them that shunned the light. He was the constant inmate of Mr. Dunstan's house, and Lady Charlotte was reputed to live well with Mr. Dunstan. She certainly disposed of his fortune as she pleased, and lent her attractions to those parties where the distinguishing feature was high play. Her partiality for Mr. Willoughby, and her delight in his conversation, was by her audaciously avowed. He was her "*cicisbeo*," her "*cher ami*!"—the person to whom she could apply in all the little wants and difficulties that beset the life of a fine lady. By him she procured the earliest and the finest flowers, and the first fruits of all the conservatories and fruit-houses in the vicinity of London; and she thought that she had fully paid the price of all these rarities and dainties, when she assured him that "he was the most useful person in the world;" or held

out her fair hand, with a declaration that “he was the best friend she had.” In all this there was nothing secret ; she rather seemed to take a pleasure, and triumph in displaying the power that she had over him, and more especially when Isabella was present — she continued, notwithstanding, to treat her with the affectation of fondness, and at the same time an evident pretension to superiority. It was, however, no longer that she was gratified by the shrinking of Isabella from the one, or that she found herself able to chase the rose from her cheek by the other.

Isabella received the pretended fondnesses with a cold civility, which shewed that she truly estimated their value, and by the impassiveness both of her countenance and manner when she attempted to throw her into shade, she

left her nothing but her own impotent malice to rejoice in.

There were, indeed, moments when Isabella thought, in spite of strong appearances to the contrary, that the game was not wholly in the hands of her rival.

She had seen, and it would be too much for the frailty of human nature to believe, that she had seen without pleasure, the workings of Lady Charlotte's countenance, and the quickened pulsation of her bosom, on the slightest symptoms that indicated a chance that her captive might escape her.

Upon these occasions it was that Isabella more particularly acknowledged the solidity of the principles upon which she had so newly been taught to act. She saw Lady Charlotte, through the rebellious contests of unholy passions, ground, to use the expression of Lady Rachel, as it were,

between two mill-stones ; consumed with rancour even where she triumphed ; stormy and agitated as the boisterous ocean, when thwarted in her purposes — while she, the sufferer, could say, to her aching bosom, “ be still ; ” — and could wear on her unruffled countenance the peace of resignation !

It had happened that Isabella had been suddenly taken ill, when Mr. Willoughby was in another room, dancing with Lady Charlotte. The bustle occasioned by this circumstance caught Mr. Willoughby’s ear. Lady Charlotte was instantly deserted, standing in the midst of those, before whom she had but the previous moment been displaying her triumph ; while Mr. Willoughby flew to Isabella, supported her drooping head on his shoulder, and on her recovering the powers of motion, conveyed her to her

carriage with one arm round her waist, while he held one of her hands in his. Isabella, indisposed as she was, had not failed to observe the pale and disfigured countenance of Lady Charlotte as they passed her, nor the rage which further disturbed her beautiful features, when, to her demand of "will you not return?" Mr. Willoughby had replied, "certainly not!"—in a tone which Isabella would not have exchanged for the music of the spheres.

Isabella, however, in general enjoyed too good health, to make many demands upon the sense of propriety, the good nature, or the still tenderer feelings of Mr. Willoughby; and her equable temper, her even spirits, and the *apparently* quiet enjoyment which she had in all around her, were so little the symptoms of outraged affection, or wounded feelings, to which Mr. Willoughby was accustomed, that he

found it not difficult to lull to sleep any suspicion that his conscience might sometimes awake, that he was using her ill ; or that while he treated her with unvaried kindness, and unlimited indulgence, he had any thing for which to reproach himself, or that she could have any thing to wish. And it was true, that Isabella had learnt so well to regulate her own mind, and lived at this period in so much hope, that she was less aware than at any former one of her married life, how much was in fact wanting to the completion, or the stability of her happiness.

She was soon to become a mother ; and the interest that Mr. Willoughby took in the expectation of his offspring was to Isabella a pledge that, in becoming a father, he would become all that she could wish as a husband.

The smiles of a wife, though she may not be powerful enough to thaw

the ice with which, Lady Rachel says, the world has encrusted his heart, but the smiles of his infant will cause it to melt away as before a meridian sun. When I hold my child in my arms, I think I may defy all the machinations of Lady Charlotte.

Isabella went no more into publick; but her two kind friends, Lady Rachel and Lord Burghley, took care that she did not therefore remain in solitude. The friendship of the latter had been peculiarly useful to her. Lady Rachel's chamber counsel, might sometimes have been forgotten, had she not had almost perpetually at her elbow so skilful a commentator on the text as was Lord Burghley. It was from his eye that she took the lesson which upheld her in the even course that she wished to tread, and from which she might otherwise have been in danger of swerving, as the insolence

of Lady Charlotte, or the indifference of Mr. Willoughby, at times awakened her resentment, or sunk her into sadness. She owed to his *apropos* anecdote, or ludicrous remark, the rallying moment, which gave her power to laugh when others laughed, and to be gay when Sir Charles Seymour would still attempt to make her sentimental.

Lord Burghley gave the word that there was nothing so delightful as “the *Soirees*” of Mrs. Willoughby; and Lady Rachel had sanctioned the opinion, by having broken through her general rule, and establishing herself almost every evening in Isabella’s drawing-room. As Isabella was understood to be always “at home,” all who were upon her visiting list might present themselves between the hours of nine and twelve; and even of the gayest and the busiest, there were few who, from curiosity to see “what sort

of a thing it was," did not sometimes find their way thither. But the more habitual party was of such who, not being overwhelmed by engagements from home, or who, finding no attractions at home, eagerly seized this escape from solitude, and the tedium of conversing with their own thoughts; and this substitute for dissipation, which from various causes they could no longer partake of elsewhere.

To this part of her visitors, Isabella furnished the resource of the card table; while she found her own amusement amongst the few of superior intellect, and cultivated taste, whom Lady Rachel and Lord Burghley had drawn around them. The group, of which Isabella formed the centre, assumed from hence something of a literary aspect, and gave a colour to the sarcasms of Lady Charlotte, that "Mrs. Willoughby was become a blue

stocking." To pick up anecdotes to which she could give a ludicrous turn, and to ascertain as well as she could what was really passing in Isabella's mind, Lady Charlotte not unfrequently passed ten minutes or a quarter of an hour at Mrs. Willoughby's, on her progress to gayer scenes, and more interesting parties. If she found Mr. Willoughby at home, she would offer to set him down at his evening's engagement; or she would sometimes enter with him and some hanging-on female companion, at the latest period of Isabella's assembly, and tell her, with an insolent air, "see, I have brought your wanderer home."

Patiently as Isabella had brought herself to bear these impertinencies, she was not sorry to have an active defender, and sometimes an avenger, in her young friend Mr. Burghley.—He was one of her most certain vi-

sitors ; and he had no greater delight than to make himself a torment to Lady Charlotte. As he was considered merely as a good-natured rattle, though felt at times to be a sharp one, it would have been beneath the dignity of Lady Charlotte to have been offended by what she called “his intolerable nonsense ;” but the buzzing bee would often make her feel his sting, and then fly off to enjoy the honey of Isabella’s smile. At other times he would attach himself so closely to Lady Charlotte, that she could not shake him from her, and he would oblige her to carry him away in her carriage, that he might be at hand, he said, “to amend her report,” which he gravely assured her “was often very faulty, from her not at all understanding what had been passing under her eyes”—thus instituting himself both as a spy, and a restraint upon Lady Char-

lotte, by which he not unfrequently rendered Isabella the most essential service, in bringing over the laugh to his side ; which, had it remained on Lady Charlotte's, might have found its way in a graver form to the apprehensions of Mr. Willoughby.

But the most indefatigable and assiduous of Isabella's visitors was Sir Charles Seymour. Do what she would to put him out of his play, he was too experienced a gamester to be foiled by so truly ingenuous and artless an opponent. She could not but bow to the opinion that she knew Lady Rachel entertained of him ; but now that she had no weaknesses of her own to make her afraid of him, she was not able to discover any thing in the manners of Sir Charles that could distinguish his attentions to her from those of any other well-bred man whom the constant intercourse of society allowed

to call himself her friend. There were now no insidious remarks to alarm her, no affected compassion to soften her, no pretended zeal to interest her; she saw him but as an amusing companion, and a good-natured well-wisher; and Sir Charles congratulated himself on having laid not only her prudence asleep, but the much more formidable suspicions of her friends, and was content, like the crafty beast, of a less savage nature, to remain quiet in his lair until he could rush out and seize his defenceless prey.

All these different aims and chicaneries appeared to be matters of no concern to Mr. Willoughby, feeling himself secure in the innocence and integrity of Isabella, and seeing nothing in her conduct but what must be the result of the purest modesty, that she should amuse herself in these hours of restraint in the best manner

she could, appeared to him but as a thing of course,—“what all the world did,” and “what it would be very foolish not to do.” He sometimes made a part of her society; but he felt no call upon himself to sacrifice the more vivid pleasures that awaited him elsewhere, and contented himself with believing that she was so surrounded by friends that she could not want him.

“The ice has not yet begun to melt!” said Isabella, with a sigh.

“It must be broken up by storms,” replied Lady Rachel.

The tenderness of the wife, however, still clung to gentler methods; and the moment now arrived when Isabella believed herself in the possession of all that she most wished for.

CHAP. XVIII.

“Magdalen, hitherto, has only known
The name of sorrow.”

WILSON.

THE evening meetings were given up; the parties were dissolved; Isabella presented a son to her husband!

It may be doubted whether Isabella could have been persuaded to believe that there was a bliss beyond what she experienced, when, after having been supported by Mr. Willoughby through hours of agony, she beheld the tears

flow in currents down his cheeks, when he embraced first herself, and then her child, — when she heard him thank her, again and again, for the courage that she had shown, and for the treasure that she had given him, — and when she heard him exclaim that he had never known a real pleasure until that moment.

But the enthusiasm of the hour passed away, and with it much of that glowing hope and vivid joy which had made Isabella assure herself, and assure Lady Rachel, that “henceforth she should have nothing to wish.”

Yet Mr. Willoughby passed many hours with Isabella whenever he could be admitted into her apartment, and felt no attraction powerful enough to withdraw him from his boy; by the side of whose little resting-place he would remain silent and contemplative until the nurses grew weary of his

presence. Nothing could exceed his anxious cares for the one, or the lively pleasure he took in the other; and Mr. Willoughby in these virtuous and happy hours recognised the feelings and the principles that had once made him equally beloved by others, and contented with himself.

From this hour, thought he, I will be what once I was! The time lost shall be redeemed!—I will live for my boy!—too happy, if my most assiduous cares can guard him from the follies of his father!

How natural to the heart of man the wish to be virtuous!—how difficult to accomplish that wish! To retread the faulty steps of twelve years was not to be done by a wish!

“As soon as you are sufficiently recovered, my love,” said Mr. Willoughby to Isabella, “we will go to Brighton. Bathing will strengthen you,

and the sea air will blow roses into my boy's cheeks."

"I understood," said Isabella, "that we were to go into Westmorland. You have not been there for a long time; and I should like to see the place where you passed the first years of your life."

"If I could recover the tastes that I then had, I should like to go too," returned Mr. Willoughby; "but you would find it a most *triste sejour*. I could fear almost, that the old house had tumbled down by this time. I have not lately been plagued about repairs; so that I begin to suspect that the mansion has filled up the lake, and thus I have got rid of two plagues together."

Mr. Willoughby said this with an air of chagrin and bitterness that gave Isabella pain.

"I think you would be sorry to lose

either your lake or your house," replied she; "and Lady Rachel has described Eagle's Crag so majestic, so sublime, yet with a mixture of so many milder beauties, that I should think the novelty of the scene to me, who have seen only the artificial features of the metropolitan counties, would be a security from all weariness; and our boy may get the "thews and sinews" of his ancestors, by scrambling upon his hereditary mountains. Would not that renew to you the pleasure that you once took in doing so yourself?"

"I *should* like to look upon the old place once more," said Mr. Willoughby; "and I should not be sorry if my boy should like it better than any other spot under heaven, but I fear you would soon be weary of solitary mountains and silent streams; and the distance is so enormous, that,

except one could remove with a wish, it would be very inconvenient to have such long journies to make perpetually."

"But why should we not determine to pass several months there?" said Isabella, timidly.

"Because," said Mr. Willoughby, laughing, "I verily believe, if I were to make such a determination, I should break it in a week. I have still a horror of the *ennui* that seized me when I was last there; and I was so teased with applications that I could not grant, and told of so many wants that I could not supply, that I almost made a vow never to go there again."

"But you would go in society now," said Isabella. "Our boy will soon be a playfellow for you; and I suppose that there are human creatures even in Westmorland?"

"I doubt whether you would think

them so," returned Mr. Willoughby, "when compared with the standard of humanity to which you have been accustomed. But if you really have taken a fancy to see the old place, I would have *you* go by all means. I will follow you when I can, and stay with you as long as I can, or we will return together; for I question whether a very short taste of Eagle's Crag will not suffice. Three weeks' sojourn may perhaps bring you over to my mind, that my pretty box in Hertfordshire is worth all my Northern possessions."

Isabella's heart sunk at the proposal of going alone.

"Beechwood," said she, with a sigh, "is very dear to me. But I am in no haste to leave London; I will stay your leisure to accompany me wherever we go."

"Oh! by no means," replied Mr.

Willoughby. “I am impatient to have the boy out of the suffocation of this place; and, if you really don’t like Brighton, this may be as good a year as any, for you to gratify your curiosity as to Eagle’s Crag. And as you will of course travel slower than I could bear to do, although you may set out before me, yet perhaps I may beat you in. I should not dislike a fortnight’s exercise in some of my old haunts.”

“Do you think it possible that I could prevail upon Lady Rachel to accompany me?” said Isabella.

A sudden flush deepened the colour of Mr. Willoughby’s face.

“I should think not,” said he, as he struggled to repress a sigh, which yet smote on Isabella’s ear: “times long gone by. — Besides, the journey would be too much for her: I fear it would never do: yet if you could per-

suade her I should be very glad. — I should then hope — I should then think — well, do all you can. But positively I am unwilling to expose you to what I fear, after all, you will not like. I do not know whether the place is fit to receive you; for although I have no actual fears of its falling down, it is rather too substantial for that, yet things must be in strange disorder. There must be much fumigating and airing before I shall trust you and your little companion within the old walls.”

“I had thought,” said Isabella, “that you had not suffered the place to be neglected.”

“For some years every thing was taken care of,” returned Mr. Willoughby. “I had used to think that when I married I should like to renew the old ways of going on — but that fancy wore away with many other

youthful fancies. There were some good people whom I used to love, but I saw little of them, and so I began to attach myself to the people, good or bad, that were more within my reach,—and still something put off marrying. The keeping so large a place in neatness and airing was expensive. I was grown fond of Beechwood, I had laid out large sums of money upon it, and I began to think it was not wise to spend money upon what gave me no pleasure, when I had so many uses for it that did.”

“Yet,” said Isabella, “Lady Rachel has told me that Eagle’s Crag is not in a state of desolation.”

“Perhaps not,” replied Mr. Willoughby, “not absolute desolation. There is an old housekeeper and an old steward, who, I really believe, would spend the last farthing they have, rather than that it should go

quite to decay. Perhaps they may have kept it weather tight, clean, and whole. I know that Lady Rachel has correspondence with some of her old connexions in Westmorland, and she may have heard something of this from them ; but I will write, and see how matters stand ; and I am sure if Evans and Roberts *can* make you a few rooms comfortable they will do so, for it will rejoice their kind hearts to see the descendant of my father. For their sakes, as you wish to look upon the mansion of my forefathers, I shall be glad that you should go. I shall be delighted to give them such a pleasure ; they well deserve this, and all, and more than all I can do for them, at my hands."

Isabella's heart was saddened by this conversation. If her hopes could have rested upon the amiable feelings which had shone through the indifference and carelessness of thinking, which Mr.

Willoughby too plainly manifested, she could not but be aware that no principle had appeared upon which she might depend ; and she could receive no pleasure from so ready an acquiescence in her wishes, when their gratification was to be purchased by a separation from her husband. She began to question the expediency of such a step ; she determined to consult Lady Rachel, and she resolved, if she did go to Eagle's Crag, to prevail on her, if possible, to accompany her thither.

CHAP. XIX.

“ Eye me, blest Providence, and square my trial
To my proportion’d strength.”

MILTON.

ISABELLA found every encouragement possible from Lady Rachel as to the expediency of her visiting Eagle’s Crag, but upon the point of her own journey to the same place, she found her unpersuadable.

“ Child,” said she, “ you sometimes tell me that I delight in martyrdom ; but you are mistaken. I would not undergo what the re-entrance into

Eagle's Crag would make me suffer for any less consideration than to save its unfortunate master, his amiable wife, or his helpless offspring, from misery and destruction! With such an object in view, or to rejoice in its accomplishment, I would suffer anything; but, without such a motive, I would rather embrace the rack than look again upon scenes once so delightful — now so blasted! Urge me no more — but do you go — perhaps you may be the appointed agent of restoration to the virtues and the blessings that once made that sacred spot their favoured residence. — Nor will you find it such a desolated place as its careless master apprehends. There has been a guardian hand upon it, from the hour when he, with such a prodigal thrift, withdrew his — make yourself mistress of all the details that Roberts and Evans can give you. Be

not afraid to act; your husband, whatever he is besides, is no tyrant; he will bless you for the good which he will not take the trouble to do. He will thank you for having shielded his child from the beggary which he is fast bringing upon him; and which, should it be completed, will break his own heart, if it be not callous, to the core."

"Good Heavens!" said Isabella, "is Mr. Willoughby in danger of beggary?—and what endless sums have I squandered away in follies for which I did not care; but which his kindness, his indulgence, seemed never to think sufficient for my gratification."

"The first restraint from which he freed himself," said Lady Rachel, "was the restraint of calculation. When first he became, what is called 'his own master'—miserable misnomer as it is!—he knew that he was rich; and he continued to persuade

himself that he was so, when he had taken every means to be poor ; but all that was done, or lost, or given, for follies and virtues were strangely mingled — was but a trifle for ‘ a man of his fortune.’ So his flatterers told him, so he told himself ; and being unrestrained by settlements or entails, he has been longer of finding his mistake than he would otherwise have been. I have reason to think that he *has* found it — whether too late or not I cannot tell ; be it your care to probe the matter to the bottom. Accept as a favour from Heaven the desire that has been awakened in your heart to visit Eagle’s Crag. I do not tell you that happiness awaits you there, but I believe that you and your child would have been undone, if your residence had been confined to Grosvenor Square and Beechwood.”

“ I entreat you,” said Isabella, in an

agony, “to tell me all that you know on this terrific subject. Oh instruct me how to act!—there is nothing that I will not do. I will strip myself of the most indispensable necessities, if I may, by so doing, preserve my husband and my child!”

“Moderate your feelings,” said Lady Rachel; “the remedy is not to be found in exaggerated apprehensions; the reverse of wrong is not right. I am not mistress of any such specific facts as to justify my giving either the absolute certainty, or the extent of the mischief incurred. The property *was* extremely large—there must be great resources. I believe the evil to be great; I hope it is not irretrievable; but, whatever it is, you would but aggravate it, were you to attempt to lessen the expenditure by any violent means, or by any undisguised declaration even of your suspicions that any

thing is wrong—your unhappy husband has the spirit of a martyr in his follies. Act with caution, and without any sudden or apparent change in your usual manner of proceeding. The few hundred pounds that you can save without the concurrence of your husband would be a trifle to what will be spent by others ; and never forget that economy and parsimony are of two houses. I have known those who would quarrel with their housekeeper for the waste of a score of eggs, who would lay out five guineas in a piping bullfinch.”

“ Oh how unfitted am I, for the task before me,” exclaimed Isabella.

“ Why unfitted ?” replied Lady Rachel. “ God has given you an intellect to comprehend, an integrity to support the difficulties that surround you. With good sense and probity we need not fear but that we shall disco-

ver the right path, nor that we shall want courage to pursue it. You have now entered upon your *real* education; the mortal is training for immortality!"

It is certain that nothing short of the high views which Lady Rachel gave Isabella of the task assigned her would have enabled her to have undertaken it with any chance of success; the greatness of the object absorbed all lesser considerations. And even her reluctance to separate from Mr. Willoughby, which might have taken, with the help of some worldly sophistry, the form of virtue; or which might in softer moments have degenerated into an effeminate sorrow, was held in controul by the sense of the responsibility which as an accountable creature was laid upon her. Even all that she was likely to be called upon

to do or to suffer for his sake, and for that of her boy, faded before the apprehension of how she should approve herself to her God !

CHAP. XX.

“ She who in the region of delight
Slumber'd in the sun-shine, or the shelter'd shade,
Rose with the storm.”

WILSON.

NOTWITHSTANDING the exalted tone of thought that Isabella's conversation with Lady Rachel had given to her mind, it was not without a degree of shrinking from the burning iron which was presented to her hand, that she heard Mr. Willoughby tell her, “ that things at old Eagle's Crag were not so bad as he had feared ;” that “ Roberts

and Evans had undertaken to have all matters in tolérable order whenever she should be ready to make her journey."

"And indeed, my love," said he, looking anxiously at her, "if you feel strong enough, the sooner you set out the better, except you would take a month's strengthening at Brighton before you go, for your confinement has made you thin and pale; paler and thinner, it really seems to me, than you were a week ago."

"Will it not suit you to go with me?" said Isabella. "I should have such pleasure in viewing with you the haunts of your childhood, and in being introduced by you to all your favourite spots."

"Oh! indeed you would not!" said Mr. Willoughby, with a kind of a shudder, "Retrospection always makes me sad. No, no! be you my *avant*

courier. You will put every thing into nice order, I know ; and when I see you and Godfrey with all your comforts about you, and the old mansion trim and well set out, I shall not be assailed by that legion of blue devils which crossed my path wherever I went when I was last there. But one thing I beg : don't let Roberts talk to you about expense ; for although, when nobody was there to see whether the place were neatly kept or not, I thought it nonsense to have money thrown away upon its walks and seats ; yet now that you are to traverse the one, and to repose upon the other, I would have every thing as complete as your own drawing-room, and every thing done that can please your eye, or gratify your senses. You will want all," added he, with a kind of melancholy smile, " to make Eagle's Crag

resemble any thing you ever saw before."

"Its very novelty," said Isabella, "I have no doubt, will have a charm for me. And could you," added she, casting a doubting eye on Mr. Willoughby, "could you have gone with me"—then, seeing denial in his face, she immediately changed the conclusion of the sentence into—"yet you will follow me so immediately I trust, that I will endeavour to think it the same thing."

"Oh! it will be quite so," returned Mr. Willoughby. "You may depend upon it I will join you as soon as possible; but I think I must have a few dips in the sea first; I feel quite relaxed; and I have some arrangements to make in Hertfordshire. If you should really take a fancy to Eagle's Crag, it might not be amiss to sell Beechwood; the place is expensive,

and if you are determined not to go to it, I see no good in keeping it."

"Surely, my dear Mr. Willoughby," said Isabella, "in all such things you must determine for me. I am not aware that I ever did say I would not go again to Beechwood. Wherever you wish me to be, there I will be; and whatever arrangements you may think right, I will acquiesce in with pleasure."

"Spoken like a prettily-behaved wife," said Mr. Willoughby, kissing her. "But, Isabella, you look grave. I do not love either to make, or to exact sacrifices. Let us each do as we like, and then we are sure to be pleased with each other; for I am confident that you will never like any thing that I could seriously disapprove, and I hope you can say as much for me."

"I hope I never gave you reason

to think otherwise," said Isabella, "nor ever shall."

Mr. Willoughby did not press for a more explicitly expressed confidence in the rectitude of his taste: he turned the current of the conversation, by asking, "when she thought she should be ready to leave London, and how long she intended to be in making her journey?" Isabella named a week as a sufficient time for any preparations that she had to make; and she referred to Mr. Willoughby, who knew the distance, and the rate of travelling, better than she did, as to the other particular.

All this being arranged between them, Mr. Willoughby promised to write to Roberts, fixing the day, later than which, nothing must be unfinished that would be necessary to the comfortable reception of Isabella at Eagle's Crag; and having so done, he quitted

her to follow his "own likings," in whatever direction they might lead him.

Isabella, left to herself, found from what had passed abundant cause for a variety of reflections, as new as they were unpleasant to her.

It was very evident that Mr. Willoughby would not be sorry for a pretence to get rid of his house in Hertfordshire; and it did not escape her that he contemplated without reluctance the possibility that she would fix herself wholly at Eagle's Crag. That her doing so, provided he could persuade himself that she preferred it to any other residence, would not be any restraint upon his more vagrant fancies; and though his natural generosity and indulgent temper made him urge her to deny herself nothing which she could desire to have, yet she could not forget that he had said, that he

“thought it nonsense to spend money upon what gave him no pleasure, when he had so many uses for it that did.” His observation, on even the passing shadow on her countenance, told her that he would ill brook any interference in his own pursuits, and would hold himself little obliged to her for a prudence that reproached his want of it, or for any sacrifices exacted by his want of consideration. Nor could she fail to be struck by the incongruity between his first dissuasion from her going to Eagle’s Crag at all, and the readiness with which he now accelerated her departure, and for a tarriance to which there did not appear to be, in his mind, any definite end.

These reflections took even a deeper tinge, when, two days afterwards, he returned to the subject, with

“I have been thinking, Isabella, that it will not be unadvisable to take

this opportunity of making some little alteration in our household. Here we are at the latter end of August; our Northern summer is a late one; you will probably not be disposed, should it happen that you really do fall in love with fells and rocks, to think of quitting Westmorland much before Christmas; and that would be an awkward time for you and Godfrey to encounter so long a journey. Perhaps it may be latish in the Spring before you would think of returning to town, especially if I *should* dispose of the Hertfordshire house, where you might otherwise have been until London had anybody in it. Now, all this taken into the account, will it not be as well to get rid of the cook? I have not been satisfied with him for some time; he is not what he was when I first took him; he is very expensive and very insolent; and I do not think

our Westmorland neighbours would much relish his *cuisine*. And then there is your housekeeper: she and Evans would never understand one another; and there would be such lifting up of hands at the extravagance of the one and the parsimony of the other, that you would not know what to do between them. I think, if you have no objection, I should advise that Le Clare and Thompson march off together: between them they would be likely to upset all the Median laws of Eagle's Crag, and would drive poor Roberts and Evans out of their wits. No doubt we can find damsels in Westmorland who can scour floors and dust furniture; so that I would propose to part with the whole of our present establishment of that kind, and trust to Evans to collect a household over whom she would have the undisputed control; with

the exception, however, of your personal attendant and the nurses; of course, none of these can be displaced. Have you any objection to this plan?"

Isabella knew so little of the detail of anything that went on in her own house, and would have thought so little of personal inconvenience, if she had foreseen any, that she gave a prompt and cheerful acquiescence; and the whole matter would have passed as a thing of no consequence, had it not been for the intimation that she had received from Lady Rachël; but with this clue in her hand she could not but trace, in what was represented merely as a temporary arrangement, and as arising from the unforeseen circumstance of the projected visit to Eagle's Crag, a purpose of making a permanent change in their way of living, and a retrenching of

expense, which she well knew could only arise in the mind of Mr. Willoughby from a sense of the most imperative necessity for such a measure. She was, however, more cheered by seeing the readiness with which he had anticipated her own purposes, than alarmed by any deprivation that might eventually fall on herself. She had no distinct idea either of the resources or the expenditure of Mr. Willoughby. She had been told, when she married him, that his fortune would allow of every indulgence that her heart or her fancy could require; and she had experienced so liberal a supply of money, and saw herself surrounded by such a superfluity of luxury, that she could not but think that much might be parted with, and yet more remain than was essential to everything that she could want. She was too well acquainted with the mo-

difying jargon of the “necessity of some arrangement”—“some little difficulties”—“what happens to everybody,” to be much alarmed by such designations, or to suspect how frequently they denominated bankruptcy and disgrace.

The word “beggary,” indeed, from the mouth of Lady Rachel, had smote upon her heart; but she knew Lady Rachel’s unshaded way of speaking; and she was rather inclined to indulge the hope that Lady Rachel had admitted, that the evil might be averted, than to adopt her fear that it was irretrievably incurred. Yet the whole face of the purposed visit to Eagle’s Crag had changed; instead of a few weeks residence in a place where the novelty and the magnificence of the objects around her might well supply the want of her usual society, and which she could quit at any moment

when she grew weary of it; and where, while she remained, there would be no falling off in any of those circumstantial accommodations to which she was accustomed, she now could not but perceive that her removal into Westmorland might be the commencement of a banishment from all that had hitherto made the pleasure of her life; from her usual haunts! from her usual companions!—from her family!—that the economy of all around her was about to be changed, and that she was too likely to find herself alone in a situation at once new, strange, and difficult. Lady Rachel had indeed told her that good sense and probity were sufficient for the exigency, but she felt herself ignorant, and she suspected that she might find herself weak.

Of all that passed in her mind, it was not possible that Isabella could disclose any part to Mr. Willoughby.

No communication had ever been between them respecting what was indeed the mutual interest of both. "Spend, and I will supply," had been the only financial regulation where she was concerned, that Mr. Willoughby had ever made; and she was fully aware that she would be the last person to whom he would unbosom himself, either as to the evils to which his indiscretion might have exposed him, or respecting the means by which they might be remedied. To be "good humoured and well dressed," had been his first admonition; and she could not but see that he gave her little credit for any qualities that were beyond those necessary for the fulfilling it.

Under these impressions Isabella made her farewell visits to the remaining few of her friends who still continued in town. — Lady Jane and her daughters had already gone to their

summer mart, where attractions could be best exchanged for settlements, or where the chance was the greatest, that the flirtations of the Spring might be finished up by the marriage of the Autumn.

Isabella would have been glad to have taken one of her sisters with her into Westmorland, but Lady Jane had put her negative upon any such wish, by observing, that her sisters could not be allowed to bury themselves with her in so remote a country residence till they had secured one for themselves—and to this Isabella knew she had nothing to reply.

The kindness of friendship might however have supplied the companionship, which the calculation of relationship had refused. Mrs. Nesbitt declared herself ready to go *any where* with her dear Mrs. Willoughby—even to *that* Westmorland!—but it

had happened, that in a full persuasion of the power which she supposed that she still held over the mind of Isabella, she had been loud and vehement in her remonstrances against any such scheme ; and had represented it as little less than exile from all that bore the name of humanity ; had foretold the certain death of Isabella, at once from rushing torrents, impassable mountains, and moping solitude ; and had farther denounced, that should she escape as by a miracle from all these, that the still greater evils of triumphant rivalship, and galling neglect, would fall upon her head ; with many hints that she would deserve *all* that she so brought upon herself if she obstinately persisted in a plan so preposterous. Having thus incautiously declared her opinion of the step that Mr. Willoughby was going to take, it was not difficult for Isabella to escape

from all the wishes and offers of Mrs. Nesbitt to accompany her in her banishment. She did this by a peremptory and explicit declaration that she would not involve any one in such horrors as Mrs. Nesbitt had predicted, for any selfish consideration whatever, and that therefore there was no more to be said or done, but to remain obliged to Mrs. Nesbitt for the sacrifice that she offered her.

Mrs. Nesbitt thus having overshot her mark, could only repent her former authoritative tone ; and indemnify herself the best she could for the present disappointment, by declaring to all who would hear her, that Isabella was the most obstinate and ungrateful young person with whom she ever had to deal.

Lady Rachel was the single person, in parting from whom, Isabella felt any real sorrow ; but the separation

from her was bitter. She was become to her like a second conscience, and as an oracle whose dictates she implicitly followed—it was to cut off a right hand to be without her. Nor were her regrets wholly selfish—in spite of Lady Rachel's self-control, Isabella perceived the unusual workings of her mind as she bade her farewell.

“ You are going to Eagle's Crag !” said she, and her lips quivered. “ You are going to tread in the footsteps of those whose path has led to Heaven ! Emulate their ways ! You will behold scenes where once there was bliss exceeded only by that known to our first parents before they fell ! You may not be able to restore this paradise ; at least *deserve* to have it restored to you ! You will behold the spot where all that constitutes human happiness was blasted with the sudden-

ness of the lightning's flash ! Learn hence, that here below, the battle is not to the strong, nor the race to the swift ; but look beyond this 'visible diurnal sphere,' and behold the crown that has been trodden in the dust by mortal feet, shine in bright effulgence around the immortal brow ! — Farewell !”

CHAP. XXI.

“A man may smile, and smile, and be a villain.”

SHAKSPEARE.

THE emotion of Lady Rachel's parting words had impressed a solemnity on the feelings of Isabella, which appeared to Mr. Willoughby as the token of regret in the choice that she had made.

“Do you repent your selection of your summer residence?” asked he. “If you do, for Heaven's sake, don't go. Nothing is so foolish as to do a

thing because it has been determined upon, when one has lost the relish for it. I don't half like the scheme myself; I begin to feel that I shall be very uncomfortable to have you and Godfrey at such a distance from me. Had we not better all go to Brighton together?"

"If you really wish that we should do so," replied Isabella, "I am ready to give up the Westmorland scheme; but I have not repented of my choice, and the less as you tell me that you shall not be easy to be absent from — from — from *us*. I flatter myself that I shall scarcely have time to put all things into the order which I know you like, before you are with me; but if you really wish me not to go" —

"No, no!" interrupted Mr. Wilmoughby. "Provided the matter is your own choice, I do not know any arrangement that will do better for the

remainder of the summer than spending it at Eagle's Crag ; but I would not have you go reluctantly."

" I do not go reluctantly," replied Isabella.

" Well, then things may remain as they have been fixed. But I must set you on your way. Don't hurry yourself in the morning. If you will make your first night's resting place not more than twenty miles from London, I will accompany you ; and the next morning, after seeing you all well packed up, turn off to Beechwood, where I have appointed a person upon business."

Isabella's eyes sparkled at this proposal.

" How kind, how good you are!" said she. " I shall now, indeed, begin my journey under auspices which must make it prosperous."

In fact Mr. Willoughby felt an un-

willingness to part from Isabella that he had not anticipated, and he could not contemplate her as left to the care of servants only, without a feeling of fear, which yet appeared to him too ridiculous to be avowed.

He had made something of a truce with his uneasiness by determining to escort her on her first setting out ; and he thought that he could see her depart from the inn the next morning without any return of so unusual a sensation. But he was mistaken. As he was putting her into her coach, his heart suddenly smote him for thus leaving the creature in the world over whom he was most bound to watch, with the sedulous care of love, to the protection of a common footman only. Hastily calling to his own personal servant, —

“ Edwards,” cried he, “ mount the dickey, and attend Mrs. Willoughby to

Eagle's Crag, and return by the first coach."

"Oh no, no!" said Isabella: "indeed there is no occasion; and I am sure you will want Edwards."

"Isabella," said Mr. Willoughby, with an impressive earnestness, which made her heart both beat and glow, "I have at this moment no wish so urgent as that you shall have every attention,—every accommodation. I ought to have accompanied you myself; but as that could not be, I should not have a moment's rest if Edwards were not with you. So pray say no more about it. When he brings me word that you and Godfrey are safe and well, I shall be the happiest man in the world; that is, as happy as I can be till I rejoin you."

Isabella burst into tears; and Mr. Willoughby, pressing her to his heart,

put her into the coach, and bad her farewell.

If I am parted from with so much reluctance, why am I parted with at all? thought Isabella.

But the uneasiness which this thought involved was quickly lost in the evidence that she had just received that Mr. Willoughby could not part from her without pain. The time may come, thought she, when we shall not part at all!

Soothed with this hope, and occupied with the care of her boy, Isabella did not advert to the solitariness and newness of her situation; never before had she felt herself at her own disposal without guidance, and without protection.

The short excursions which Lady Jane had ever made from her only residence in London were made upon

such beaten roads, and ways so traversed by all who formed Isabella's world, that she could not change horses, or stop for refreshment, but the chances were that she fell in with some acquaintance; and even from almost every passing carriage she had a nod, or a smile of recognition. But she was now got fifty miles from London, in a direction that she had never gone before; and although she still looked for some familiar face in the few carriages that she met, she looked in vain; — she even thought that England must be depopulated, so few appeared its inhabitants. She travelled with her road book in her hand, that she might at least make acquaintance with names; and if she had not been ashamed of her curiosity, she would have stopped the postilions to inquire after the designation of every village through which she passed, and of every

decent looking house that she saw from the road.

Her anxiety for her boy made her day's journey short; and when she had put him to bed at an early hour, and found herself left to her own resources for the rest of the evening, she felt all the dreary unusualness of her situation.

I wish I durst write to Mr. Willoughby, thought she. But he did not desire that I would write; and then;—he always so ridicules letter-writing! He would think me silly. Yet I would say nothing of myself; I would only talk of Godfrey. But perhaps I had better not.—I will, however, write to Lady Rachel, I know that she will be glad to hear from me; and she will be pleased to know how sorry Mr. Willoughby appeared to be to part from me.

This occupation beguiled a part of the tediousness of the evening; and

having slept well, she arose with renovated spirits, and with a degree less of the feeling of being deserted, than she had had the day before.

It had been Mr. Willoughby's injunction that she should not travel more than fifty miles a day. This multiplied the days of travelling, and would have made the journey very tedious to any one less a novice than Isabella; but she observed the successive places and counties through which she passed with the curiosity and interest that she would have done had she been in a foreign country: and had she had the art of book-making, she might have furnished two elegantly-printed and hot-pressed volumes, with the views of the costumes and the wonders that she saw in her travels from London to Eagle's Crag. That which is performed daily, as a thing of the most common occurrence,

by persons of all descriptions, in mail-coaches and out, was a real epoch in the life of Isabella.

As she approached the loftier features of the Northern parts of the Island, her interest increased. Her eye dwelt with rapture on the grand inequality of form in all by which she was surrounded ; and although she clasped her infant closer to her breast, as she beheld the tremendous risings and fallings over which she was about to pass, she felt for herself nothing but pleasure. In this pleasure she found no sympathy from her companions. Mrs. Adams declared, “ It was monstrous shocking ! ” And the nurse was sure that “ Master would be shook to death.” But the tender nerves of the one still stood every succeeding horror, and the apprehensions of the other were not realized.

Isabella was now arrived at her last

sleeping place ; when, as she alighted from her carriage, her eye fell on Sir Charles Seymour. With a delight little short of what might have been felt in the deserts of Arabia on recognising a countryman, she exclaimed, "Is it possible ! Sir Charles Seymour ! Oh, how glad I am to see you !"

Nor had she reason to doubt that she communicated less pleasure than she felt. Sir Charles, who had been drawn to the window by the rattling of her carriage wheels, had been as quick in acknowledging to whom it belonged, as Isabella had been in recognising her old acquaintance. Sir Charles was already at the door of the coach ; already his hand was stretched out to assist her in stepping from it, and his arm ready to support her into the house.

But not even the tumult of this unexpected meeting could make Isabella

withdraw her attention from her boy for a single moment.

“No, no, Sir Charles,” said she, “you must not hurry me away so. Nurse, give me Godfrey. There — take care — I will keep him quiet till everything is ready for him. And pray make haste; it is later than it should be, and the poor little fellow is tired.”

So saying, she received the baby into her own arms; and having no hand for Sir Charles, and being deaf to his desire that he might “bear her lovely burthen for her,” she made her way into the room that was appointed for her, followed by Sir Charles, who, in the newly-awakened affections of a mother, saw another barrier raised between him and his presumptuous hopes.

“But where is Willoughby?” asked Sir Charles.

“Detained by business,” replied Isabella.

“Well, but he is intending to follow you ; is he not ?”

“Undoubtedly—undoubtedly,” replied Isabella, whose whole attention was given to her boy, who had now begun to cry. “You must excuse me, Sir Charles ; I can think of nothing but Godfrey, till I have seen him fed and asleep.” And the nurse appearing at the same moment at the door, “I come, I come,” said she.

“But you mean to return, I hope,” said Sir Charles. “May I not have the honour of drinking tea with you ? It is rather too early an hour to think of supper.”

“Is not that your carriage which is coming to the door now ?” said Isabella.

“What a blunderer that fellow is,” said Sir Charles : “I told him, as plain

as I could speak, that I should not go farther to-night. I had anticipated a solitary evening ; but I hope you will have too much charity to let me pass it alone."

"And for myself too," said Isabella. "I will return in half an hour, and we will drink tea together."

Isabella was even better than her word, for she returned within the half hour, unconscious how the desire of society had shortened the caresses and the solitudes which she usually bestowed upon her infant.

Sir Charles had much to ask, and Isabella much to tell, of what had passed in their mutual world since last they had met. He had also to communicate his feats in the destruction of grouse ; and to raise her imagination on the scene of the "Andes vast and deserts wild" over and through which she was to pass. And

yet, it was not any of all this that was uppermost in Sir Charles's thought. Diverging from the last topic, to that which was really so :

“ I cannot but admire Willoughby's courage,” said he. “ I durst not have suffered even a sister to have made such a journey alone.”

“ Do you call it being alone ?” said Isabella, whose fondness for her husband, and Lady Rachel's remarks, made her quick to observe any impropriety that involved a reflection on him : “ do you call it being alone, to travel with such a suit as I have with me ? I can assure you that I am half ashamed of the trouble I give ; and I think myself much obliged to Mr. Willoughby, who, to gratify my impatience to visit the mansion of his ancestors, has got over all his scruples of letting me stir without him. And he has done this too at the personal in-

convenience of letting me have his own servant to attend me."

"But why did he not come with you himself?" said Sir Charles, pressing the subject.

"For very good and substantial reasons, take my word for it," returned Isabella; "but with which I should never think of troubling you, my good friend."

There was something of archness in her smile and accent, as she said these words, that could hardly be misunderstood.

"Oh, I see you think me impertinent," returned Sir Charles. "But Heaven knows how little I am really so. And I could tell you, my dear Mrs. Willoughby —"

"Nothing," interrupted Isabella, "that I shall like to hear so much, as everything about Westmorland. You say that you have been in the very

heart of its deserts. Pray tell me all their secrets. Let me hear of the height of its mountains; of the depth and clearness of its lakes. I expect to be enchanted with all these: and I cannot become too soon acquainted with their charms."

"I wish their charms may compensate for their solitude," replied Sir Charles. "But of course you don't mean to make a very long stay in this savage region?"

"Not if I find it savage," said Isabella. "I am come to be sovereign of the castle, not its prisoner."

"Have you seen Eagle's Crag," said Sir Charles.

"No," replied Isabella; "have you seen it? Pray what kind of place is it?"

"The place in the world where I should like to pass my life with the woman I loved," said Sir Charles

Isabella felt painfully at this moment her unprotected state, and it struck her that Sir Charles having remained all night at the same inn with herself had not been his original purpose, but had arisen from his unexpected meeting with her. Her heart beat quicker, yet she replied composedly,

“ You give me no distinct notion of what I may expect at Eagle’s Crag, with those we love all places are the same.” As she uttered these words she rang the bell, and on the appearance of Edwards, who had received Mr. Willoughby’s orders personally to wait on Isabella, she said, “ Pray tell Adams that I am coming up stairs directly — you will excuse me, Sir Charles ; but as I keep nursery hours in the morning, I am obliged to conform to them at night.”

Sir Charles was surprised, confound-

ed, picqued. He attempted in vain, by entreaty, and by raillery, to make her change her purpose; not the grouch which he had ordered his own servant to superintend the dressing of, nor the char that was to be cooked with all the intelligence of those best used to its excellencies, could make her alter her design; she bade the insidious tempter good night, nor was she aware how deeply her perseverance had wounded his pride and disappointed his hope, until she saw, as she withdrew, his features reflected in a glass, where his looks, "alien from Heaven," shewed plainly that it was not merely a few hours of social or friendly conversation that he sought for in detaining her.

How fast I grow in experience! thought Isabella, and how careful ought those to be in guarding them-

selves, who have no other to guard them !

Sir Charles made also his reflections on this little incident. He would willingly have believed that Isabella's prudence arose from a consciousness of weakness; but his was not a heart to be moved to softness, by virtue, even when arrayed in so much loveliness.— He was not accustomed to be foiled; and to be so by a child, who had nothing but good sense and honesty to defend her, moved his spirit more to revenge than it excited his admiration or his love.

“ If I cannot make her love me,” said he, “ I shall hate her ! and she may find my hate even more baneful than my love.”

Isabella, satisfied with herself, and not even resentful to Sir Charles, whose offence, in the world to which she was accustomed, was but of too common

occurrence, was soon sunk in the blissful repose so justly the due of innocence: but Sir Charles lay tossing even on a bed of down, and stung too sharply by the malignancy of his own thoughts to find repose in any posture. Reasoning more from a consciousness of his own designs, than from any probability that they had been penetrated by Isabella, he concluded therefore that she would no more return into his company; and when he sent a respectful message, expressive of a hope that they might breakfast together before each proceeded on their separate way, he looked for nothing but a flat refusal, or an equivocating excuse.

But Isabella had been only prudent, not angry; and felt no reason in her own mind why the half-hour that was to be passed at the breakfast table should not be passed with Sir Charles. His imagination had magnified a sim-

ple act of defensive propriety into a premeditated offence. She gave, therefore, a ready assent to his invitation ; and by so doing suggested a doubt in his double mind, whether her withdrawal the night before was fear of herself or anger against him, or, what was worse than either, perfect indifference.

The latter appeared most likely to be the case, from the ease and serenity with which she rejoined him. All was open and careless. The fineness of the morning, the beauties of the surrounding country, found them topics of conversation until Isabella was informed that her carriage was ready, and the nurse stood waiting for her lady's orders, with the infant in her arms.

Sir Charles lost not this opportunity of leaving, if possible, the two impressions on Isabella's mind which he most earnestly wished to fix there.

He hung, with well dissembled rapture, over the baby, declared him the loveliest little creature he had ever seen ; examined his tiny hands, and peeped under his eye-lids to see if the mother's eye would look out from thence. What a fond father would Sir Charles make — was the inference intended to be given.

“ Had I such a boy,” exclaimed he, “ I would not, for ‘ a day of kings’ entreaties, sell him one hour from my embracing ;” and can Willoughby — oh ! I will scold him roundly for such *insouciance* !

How negligent a father is Mr. Willoughby — was the consequence which he here wished to have drawn.

Isabella, soon “ moved with the touch of blame ” imputed to her husband, drew the wrapper gently over the child's face, and, without one reference to the pleasure of their having

met, coldly bad Sir Charles good morning ; and Sir Charles felt for the moment that he had nothing to hope either from resentment to the husband, or approbation of himself.

Well then, thought he, if I cannot make her love, I shall know how to make her fear me !

CHAP. XXII.

“ Strait my eye hath caught new pleasures,
While the landscape round it measures ;
Russet lawns and fallows grey,
Where the nibbling flocks do stray ;
Mountains, on whose barren breast
The lab’ring clouds do often rest.”

MILTON.

ISABELLA had hastened her departure, that she might arrive as early in the day as possible at Eagle’s Crag ; and she soon lost every thought of what had passed between herself and Sir Charles during the last few hours, in anticipating what she should find in those that were coming ; every

object which she now saw, might have reference to Eagle's Crag. Her inquiries were incessant. "Not yet — not yet, madam — you cannot see it yet," was the constant answer. "It lies *quite down* there; but that great mountain—the greatest of all—that with the strange shape and the high top; that—that's Eagle's Crag; the house and lake lie just under it."

Isabella looked until her eyes ached, to see that which was not to be seen. At length, as she reached the top of a moderate ascent, the voices of the postillions, and her own sagacity, assured her that she did then indeed behold the object so ardently desired to be seen. But it was seen from the pinnacle of a mountain, down which wound a road, steep, rugged, and narrow,—the most tremendous that Isabella had yet encountered, and to the bottom of which she thought it impos-

sible she should ever arrive with an unbroken carriage and whole bones. But the drivers and the horses were alike accustomed to such passes; and to Isabella's exclamation, "Surely this is not the road!" she received the encouraging admonition of, "Don't be afraid, my lady: I'll warrant you we'll soon bring you safe to the bottom." And which she soon found was justified by the ease and safety with which she descended. A few seconds only were given to what she thought the peril of her situation. Every succeeding moment was occupied in examining the objects that lay before her; and there could scarcely be found, in nature or art, any more calculated to fix the attention.

The gigantic mountain of Eagle's Crag raised its huge form in strangely grotesque features innumerably varied. Here a ponderous mass of unshapen

stone; there the light minaret of Saracenic architecture; the sacred cathedral, in all its Gothic magnificence, here carried up the thoughts to heaven: while there, the meek appearance of the shepherd's lowly hut recalled them to the scanty comforts of human existence. Towers of every shape—gateways—arches—all were there portrayed by the hand of Nature, or arose under the plastic power of imagination.

At the foot of this mighty work of the great Creator, stood the mansion of the ancient family of the Willoughbys; a turreted stone building of irregular form, and extended dimensions, largely occupying with its gardens and appendages parts of the capacious basin which was formed on three sides by the surrounding heights. To the South spread a lake, clear as crystal, with its deeply indented out-

line, and its banks gay with autumnal flowers and tufted brushwood. Beyond the lake lay a park, which stretched away to the South far as the eye could reach; the branching heads and elegant forms of its numerous herds of different kinds of deer were seen reposing on the banks of the lake, or reflected from its surface. The whole scene was lighted up by the dazzling brilliancy of a declining sun; and Isabella, enraptured and enchanted, breathless with delight and wonder, could not find words in which to express her feelings.

Oh! here indeed, thought she, I could live for ever! *if* Mr. Willoughby would live with me! The *if* sobered her ecstasy. Without him, thought she, even this paradise would be a dreary waste!

She embraced her boy; she dropped a tear on his cheek, nor was her own

dry when the carriage stopped, and she saw herself surrounded by a group of domestics who were assembled to receive her, and to obey her orders. In every face she beheld respect and duty, but there was no affectionate gratulation, no recognition of past kindness. She came amongst them as a stranger, —and a stranger unsupported, and unaccompanied by the only individual from whom she could have derived a right to their attachment, or who could have recommended her to their favour. Even in entering her own house she felt herself an intruder. Why did Lady Rachel send me here? thought she; and the sadness of her heart communicated itself to her countenance, and gave an air of languor and fatigue to every movement.

“Our rough hills have tired you, madam,” said a respectable looking personage, whom Isabella had no difficulty in

assuring herself could be no one but Mrs. Evans; and she said it with a voice of so much kindness that Isabella felt that she had already a friend.

“Yes,” said she, “I do feel tired; but I am sure that I shall find every thing here that I can wish or want.”

The good-will became instantly reciprocal; for the mild obligingness of Isabella went to Mrs. Evans’s heart in a moment.

“If Mr. Roberts or myself, madam, had left any thing undone that we could do to make every thing as it ought to be, I am sure we should be very wrong, and should have done very contrary to my master’s orders. I hope, madam, my master is well?”

Isabella’s full heart would hardly allow her to answer in the affirmative. She diverted the current of her thoughts by saying, “that is Mr. Roberts, I am sure; and presently I must

learn from you two who all these good people are. I have no doubt but that we shall be very happy together."

As she said this, she entered a large and highly ornamented hall, "bedight" with painted windows and full-length pictures of a long line of ancestry.

Isabella stopped to gaze. She was surprised at the perfect order and preservation in all that she saw.

"It all looks," said she, "as if Mr. Willoughby had only quitted it yesterday!"

"Ah, madam!" said Mrs. Evans, "it is a long time since my master was here; but we shall soon see him now, I am sure, and it will be a joyful day to all when he comes."

Isabella's heart glowed within her, on this testimony to the character of her husband. "I see so much to admire," said she, as she ascended the stairs, "that I forget that I ought to

lose no time in putting my little boy to bed. Pray shew me where he is to sleep."

"I hope you will like the room I have prepared for him, madam," returned Mrs. Evans. "It was my master's nursery, just by my lady's room. She never could have him too near her, and so I thought it might be the same with you, madam."

"Thank you for thinking so," said Isabella. "You will see that you thought rightly.—Oh! what a beautiful room!—and every thing that can be wanted, as if nothing had been displaced since Mr. Willoughby was a baby too!"

"That is my master's crib," said Evans. "My lady worked the quilt and curtains with her own hands; but, perhaps, it is old-fashioned now, and you may have something that you will like better for your young gentleman."

“ My boy shall sleep no where but where his father slept,” said Isabella, fervently. “ Nurse, give me the child. Oh! how pretty he looks in that pretty bed !”

The nurse was not so complimentary. She was afraid master would not sleep any where but in his own crib ; the mattress was too hard—was too soft. Master would be suffocated. The quilt was not like quilts now-a-days, — not like his own.

Isabella silenced all objections, by declaring her approbation of every thing, both general and particular, and thereby seated herself still more firmly in the heart of Mrs. Evans.

Isabella, having seen that her child was well provided for, passed from his room into a beautiful little cabinet, by which alone the nursery was separated from her own apartment.

It was furnished with hangings of

black satin in pannels, embroidered with large bunches of natural flowers; and festoons of similar workmanship over the intermediate space united the pannels. Specimens of the most delicate carving in wood by Gibbons ornamented the chimney. The tables, the cabinets, and the book-shelves were inlaid with ivory and ebony; and the curtains and the coverings of the sofa and chairs were of figured silk of a light blue colour.

“Dear Mrs. Evans,” said Isabella, “you have made every thing look so exactly as it must have done so many years ago, that I almost expect to find the Lady of the House in the next room. How is it possible that all these beautiful things can have been so well kept?”

“It is the business of my life, madam, to preserve every thing that belonged to my lady,” returned Mrs. Evans. I am *charged* to do so; but

these works of hers have never seen the light since we lost her till now. No one but my master's wife was worthy to look upon them, when she who worked them was no more.'

Isabella felt the connecting link between herself and the last possessor. May I be so beloved in my life, and lamented after my death ! thought she.

She then examined the remainder of the apartment, which seemed to be studiously constructed for the accommodation of two individuals, who even in their separation were desirous to be as little apart as possible. The inspection made Isabella melancholy. "There is much more space than I shall want," said she ; " if it were not for that beautiful little room, and its nearness to Godfrey, I should prefer some smaller apartment."

"But when my master comes," said Mrs. Evans, there will not be more

room than you will want, and you being here, madam, will make him love these rooms again ; else, when he has been here alone, he could not bear to look into them. He said, he thought he saw my lady and his good father in every corner of them.”

“ Would they were here now !” said Isabella. Mrs. Evans looked earnestly on her ; “ had you not better go down to the library, madam ?” said she ; “ there are a great many fine prints and entertaining books ; I thought you would prefer it, either to the saloon or drawing room, especially as it looks on the flower garden, and I dare say that you are like my lady, and are fond of flowers.”

Isabella willingly acceded to the proposal, but on entering the library she beheld what was dearer to her than prints, or books, or flowers ; she saw there letters and letters in the hand-

writing of Mr. Willoughby. So unexpected a pleasure transported her out of herself. “And has he written indeed!” said she. “Oh how good! how unexpected!” The words did not escape the ears of Mrs. Evans, but having stirred the fire, and brushed the hearth, she withdrew in silence.

Isabella was in the mean while devouring the feast that lay before her. The first letter which she opened contained these words :

“If you have thought of me as incessantly as I have thought of you through this tedious day, you must at this moment be employed in writing to me. I have travelled with you through every stage ; and I now picture you, after having seen our dear Godfrey asleep, over your solitary repast ; but (I trust) cheating the sense of loneliness by communicating with me. I never repented any thing more

in my life than having let you go alone ; all those reasons which appeared to me so cogent before we parted, seem as the merest trifles now I have you no longer with me. If my present uneasiness do not subside, the sale of the Hertfordshire house and the dippings at Brighton must take their chance, and I shall be down at Eagle's Crag, it may be as soon as yourself. With you on my arm, I should perhaps be better able to face the shadowy terrors and vain regrets that have kept me from the residence of my ancestors, or have scared me away when I have gone thither. Dearest Isabella farewell ! I would not miss the post for the world, and I have not another moment. Kiss my boy for me — I wish I could kiss both him and you for myself."

Isabella had never before had a letter from Mr. Willoughby.—There was

nothing that she so little expected as that he would write to her otherwise than as a matter of course, or to communicate his wishes or his orders. — She thought she was in a dream. — Were those words really addressed to her? and how unworthy was she of them! she had not written! she had not counted the hours as they passed! she had thought more of herself than of him; their only feeling in common was their affection for their boy! but if she could have flattered herself that she was regretted, how severe would have been her regrets! she was sure, in that case nothing could have tempted her to have separated herself from him. — Perhaps he may be here to-morrow, and then he will see in my delight how sincere has been my sorrow to have left him.

These were the thoughts that were suspended in her eager desire to re-

new the happiness that she felt in perusing letters so fond, so flattering. The next in order was conceived in these terms :

“ Dear Isabella, I could half laugh at myself for the miserable way I was in all Tuesday. I was really never more uneasy in my life, which was being completely ridiculous ; for certainly you and Godfrey were in no danger of being run away with, or robbed, or murdered. I hope, indeed I feel assured, that you did not experience the least difficulty. Travelling is absolutely a joke in England. I shall be glad, however, to hear that you are both safe and well ; and I hope it would occur to you to write to me, if not from your first sleeping-place, at least from the second. I find a thousand plagues here, and great difficulties in disposing of this place, at least at the price which

I am told it is worth. I was worried to death all yesterday: I feel quite nervous and relaxed. I am afraid that I must have a little sea; and if I hear that you are well, and that you like Eagle's Crag, I shall not grudge myself what will enable me the better to enjoy your society when we do meet. Farewell, my love!"

Isabella laid down the letter. Tears were in her eyes; yet but ten minutes before she would have thought herself but too happy to have had such an one from the same hand.

If I had written, thought she, the wish for my letter might have been lost before it could have arrived; yet I shall never forgive myself for not writing. But there is a third letter, languidly breaking the seal. Oh! how happy shall I be if it is like the first.

She read as follows:

"I am hurried to death, and can

get nothing done that I wish. It will be impossible that I should join you as soon as I had hoped. I must go to Brighton. Don't let Edwards return without a letter ; and tell me whether you were frightened out of your wits by the tremendous descent to Eagle's Crag. Tell me how you like everything there ; and pray tell Roberts that he must make as large a remittance to Dawkins as he can : I shall want it all, if I don't sell Beechwood. Pray make yourself very comfortable, and keep my boy in health. Yours sincerely, F. Willoughby."

The paper fell from Isabella's hands, and the tears gushed in torrents from her eyes. She could neither speak nor think. She could scarcely believe that she was the happy, the transported being, that had stood in the same spot so short a moment before. She felt how the different style of

these letters resembled the gradations of her bridal bliss, till the kindness of the one, and the happiness of the other, seemed alike to have escaped her grasp.

“It was well that I did *not* write,” were the first words that her full heart would suffer her to utter. “Oh! too truly does Lady Rachel say that he is the creature of the instant; that he is the sport of every varying feeling. By what power shall I fix him to such as can alone save him from misery, from degradation!”

The sadness of her reflections was interrupted by a notice from Edwards, that in order to obey Mr. Willoughby's orders of returning by the first coach, he should be obliged to leave Eagle's Crag early the next morning; and he therefore requested that what dispatches she might have for him might be made up that night.

Isabella could never have been less fitted than at this moment to write to her husband. She had never addressed him by letter in any part of their intercourse. The fondness that would have flowed unconstrained from her pen, had she only received his first epistle, was completely checked by the perusal of his last. Every fear that she had ever felt lest she should be thought importuning or obtrusive was strong upon her; but something also of displeasure mingled with her fears. She was incapable of writing what she did not feel; and she did not dare to express what she did feel. Her letter was short and constrained, but all that it did express was true. Thus she wrote:

“ I am very sorry that I did not write to you from off the road. I was afraid I might be troublesome. We had a very good journey, and I was

not very much alarmed even by the last hill down to this place. I was very glad, however, to find myself at the bottom on many accounts. I never beheld so magnificent, so interesting a spot! I find every thing within the house in the most exact order; and by what I see from my windows I expect the same in my walks to-morrow, but Edwards sends me word that he must be gone so early in the morning that I shall not be able to give you any account of what I see. I will give your message to Roberts. Godfrey bore the journey very well; and is now fast asleep in your former crib. I fell in with Sir Charles Seymour at ——. We passed part of the evening together; and I saw him for a moment the next morning. He will tell you, I dare say, what quantities of grouse he has killed; he seems to pride himself much on his prowess in that way. Pray be

so kind as to let me know how the sale of Beechwood goes on, and how Brighton agrees with you. I wish the clear air of these mountains was esteemed as bracing as the sea breezes. I am your affectionate wife,

“ISABELLA WILLOUGHBY.”

Isabella felt relieved when her task was over, but she was dissatisfied with the manner in which she had performed it. As she had proceeded in her writing she had attained more freedom of mind, and more courage to express what was passing there; she thought that if she had the letter then to write, that she could have done all much better; — she resolved that it should be done much better next time, and, having sealed the letter, she applied herself to the regulation of her own thoughts, discomposed, and put out of all order by the variety of emotions to which she had been exposed

during the last few hours, and by the newness and strangeness of her present situation. . She saw with pleasure a letter from Lady Rachel, and she was sure that she could not have a better assistant in the task that she had appointed herself than what that letter would be. Lady Rachel wrote as follows :

“ My dear child, never did I think that I should have addressed another letter to the mistress of Eagle’s Crag ! At my age I ought to be able to do it with a steadier hand than I can at this moment command. But if I cannot control my feelings, neither shall they master me. I will write, cost me what it will : the next attempt will be easier. I shall become accustomed to think of you in the place of her who is hidden from my eyes for ever. I shall be able to think of you in her seats, in her walks. But I charge you

enter not the hallowed walls of the building sacred to the worship of our God, if you are not determined, with an invincible determination, that you will emulate her virtues. Every step that you can now take will make you acquainted with the extent and the variety of them; and you may expect the mountains by which you are surrounded to fall and cover you, if you profane, by the factitious morals of a soft and delicate religion, those haunts which have been marked in all their windings by the genuine and vigorous exertions of a self-denying holiness. She whom you follow was happier than you, but it is not therefore necessary that she should be better. That which she learned and practised in all the blessedness of a loved companionship, you must study and acquire in solitude. She was tasked to hold herself ready to resign at a moment's warning the

consummation of all human good. You are to consider the evils of life as dust upon the balance in comparison of all earthly bliss. The stores of the best learning are now within your reach. Every book that you can open will bear marks that it has not been read in vain by those who have gone before you. *Read your Bible* : not as you have hitherto read it, as an historical or as a geographical study, but as the rule of life ; and deviate not from that rule, either into the labyrinth of sentiment or the ratiocination of sophistry. You will receive this letter in the library ; in that library where the voice of wisdom was never heard in vain. Raise your eyes to its shelves, and see there the resource that the munificence of your husband's ancestors has provided for the tedium of life, which that husband has imposed upon you. Read for the purpose of knowledge ; not for

the idle occupation of a heavy hour. The elements of all common information have been given you. They will now enable you to make the next step, which you have never yet made, and to apply them to use. Remember, that if you quit Eagle's Crag neither wiser nor better than you entered it, that you will have incurred a responsibility that you will find it difficult to discharge. I might talk to you in a softer tone. I might tell you of your hardships, of your merits, of beauty and youth buried in barren solitudes. I disdain to do it! I rejoice that you are entered upon a warfare where, if you come off victor, the palm you bear will be amaranthine! — Do I love you less? — God knoweth! — My beloved child, — the almost only object that remains to me on earth, that I *can*, that I *dare* love, disappoint not my hopes, blast not your own immortal

joys; think more of what you are called upon to perform, than what you may have to suffer. And the arms of God's mercy be around you!"

How did Isabella's heart glow within her as she read this vehement exhortation from Lady Rachel!—how did she raise her imagination to the highest pitch of human excellence! how little appeared the cares, the mortifications which had but the moment before disturbed her! she was exalted in her own estimation by the part that was given her to act; and she felt that she could never again be the child, the wavering doubting creature that she had been. She wondered that she should never have heard of such things before, and she resolved that her boy should suck them in with his very milk.

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